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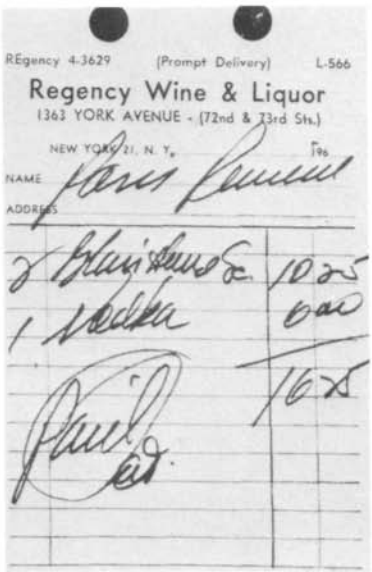

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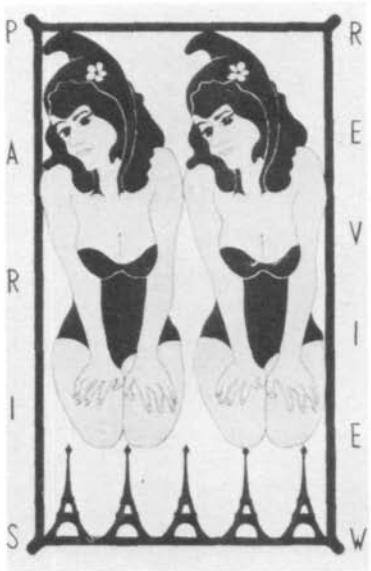

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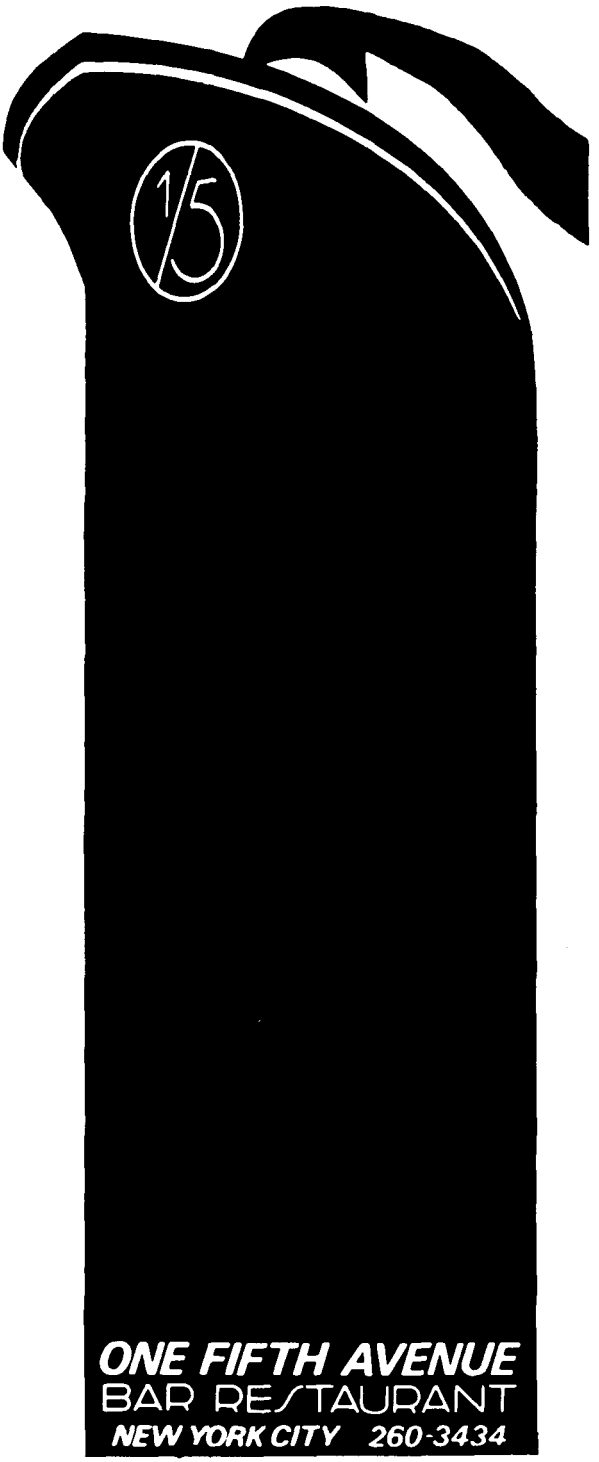

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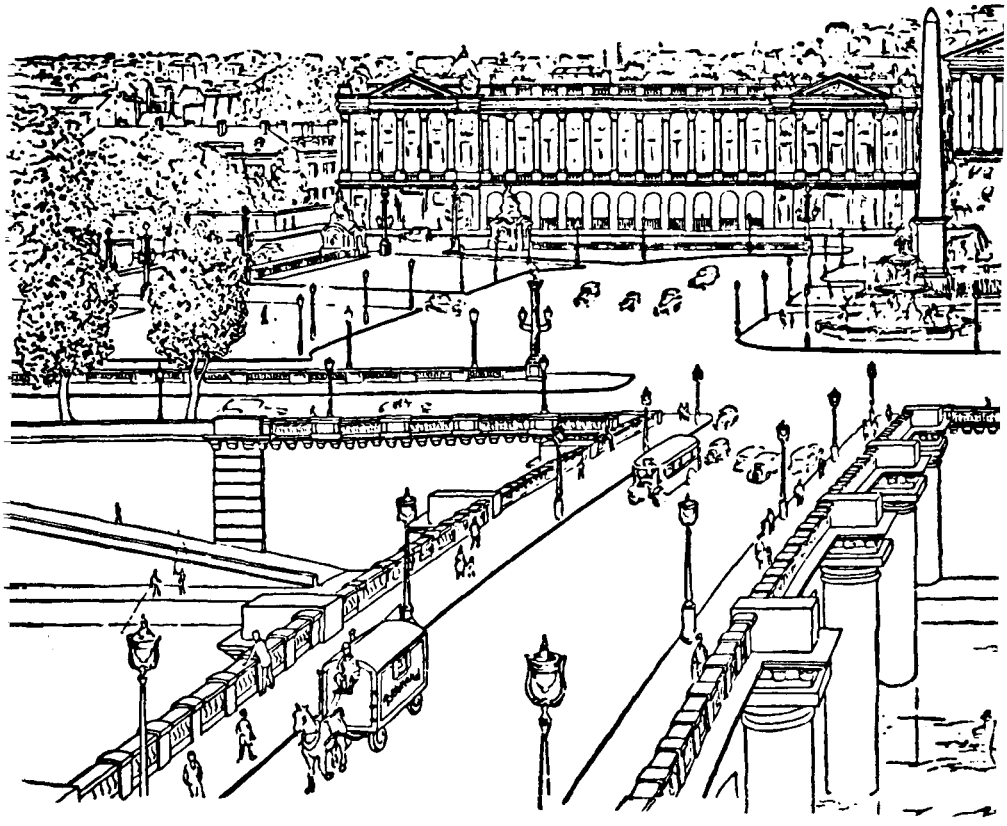

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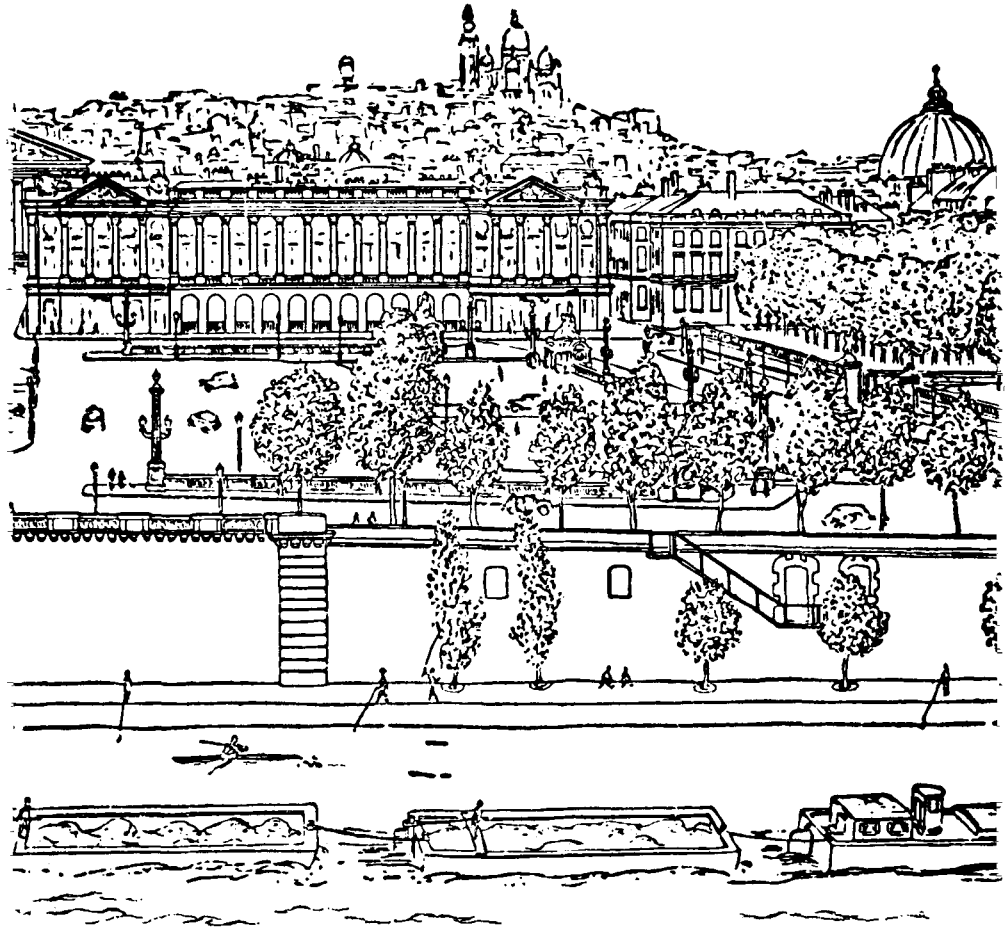

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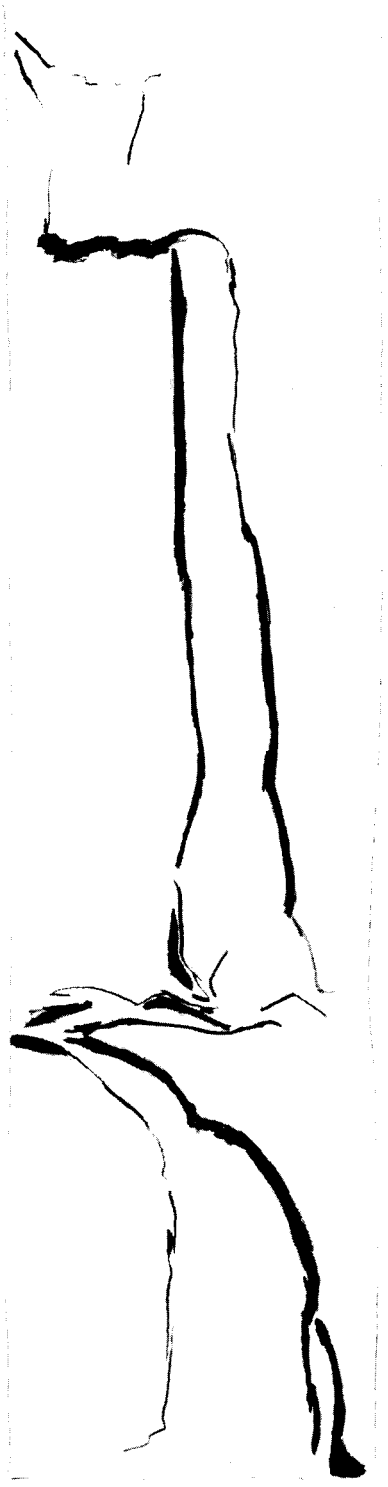

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The Flocculus

David Ohle

Oneba tells of an occasion which found him riding the trench, pedaling himself, in his fabulous little pedalcar. As he went along, so the story goes, he was set upon by a band of *trochilics,* their attendant dogs, and their teetotums. They did nothing to him that would snuff his wick at once, and when he fainted from the awful agonies they inflicted upon him they would revive him with cups of cold trenchwater, befouled and stinky, and it seeped horribly through his wiry red beard, and then commence new and more ingenious tortures. When it seemed he could bear no more, the younger members of the band got about him, smoking pissweed in bamboo pipes, laughing at Oneba's apish shrieking, and fed pine needles and cones to a slow fire smouldering on his stomach.

The next day and the day after that Oneba supplied the fun for the camp. A comely young *trochilic* woman came to him and tried to make him open his mouth, as she unbuckled the straps of her khakies. Oneba realized her purpose was evil, and so refused. At this she took a half-brick lying by and

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one by one knocked his teeth in, smashing down the dentation of the upper jaw. Then she took a rough pair of wooden pincers, used them to grasp his tongue at the roots, dragged him about the place, convulsed with mirth at his torment and his attempts to scream out.

Another pleasantry was to amass a quantity of glowing charcoal on a strip of pony hide and bind it around his head. When he would swoon the coals were removed and he would recover, but in an instant a fresh lot was applied.

He made such sport for the women and children that his death was to be as long drawn out as possible. The children enjoyed breaking his feet in the fashion of bastinado. He was staked to the mudbank and the soles of his feet clubbed until every one of the innumerable small bones was broken and the flesh reduced to jelly.

Then he was tethered on a hill of fire ants and it seemed an eternity until he fainted.

The next day he was tortured further.

The third day signs indicated the *trochilics* were breaking camp. Oneba was stuck and trussed with aluminum rods sharpened to a pencil's point, in a way that they would not immediately wound him mortally. A flint arrowhead was used to pin his thigh to the dirt, and a *trochilic* woman cleft his chin with a skinning knife so he would remember her.

Shortly after they had broken camp and rode off on their scruffy ponies, one of them came back and shot him in the head, though not fatally.

Even now the bullet is lodged where it came to rest, and forms a great protuberance there.

If I open my window I smell the opprobrium of the City drifting in with the midday sun, my sad *nicotiana* dying in the window box.

Someone made the alarming statement to a *Halflife Times* reporter that a tamale man was making his hot meat rolls in the kitchen of a squalid house of the Eastside Historic Area,

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in which members of his family are suffering the ravages of diptheria.

On the backstreets of Halflife I've seen the new *trochilic* process artists spooning dogpats into the pale faces of Halflife's children, spinning teetotums and hooting at pedestrians, their goggles casting shimmering buttons on the banquette.

Remarkable illuminations were observed in the Northern heavens on Friday and Saturday nights. The bright, diffused, white and yellow lights continued through the night, fading at daybreak. Oneba claims the phenomenon may be connected with important changes on the sun's surface, causing electrical discharges. He mentions a similar occurrence in 1883, which was directly traceable to an outbreak of the Krakatoa volcano. Reports from Copenhagen and Koenigsberg tell of the same great lights being visible in those Cities, and it is presumed that they are seen throughout Northern Europe. Under this influence, he goes on, goats have been mauled, the lungs and hearts carted off mysteriously, and the udders of the she's clipped.

Eat at one of Mexico Lindo Cafe's next time you're pedaling through Halflife. We serve lambfries, chili hearts, swellfish, and skrada-kaka takeout.

A minister of the faith dances with an inflated companion, called *icies* here at Halflife, down the aisle of the Church of the Ark, Oneba's church, and people are sunning themselves by the millions, like turtles, all the way along the national trench.

Oneba says music is the fourth material want of our nature. First is food, raiment, then shelter, and finally music. He encourages us to play the short-horn, to whistle on the streets, to toot kazoos.

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Here I am, sitting in the squalid and closet-like kitchen of my trailer home, gumming a plug of D-meat, suffering a week of dry flatulence.

Come to the Dixie Peanut, Halflife's only tavern, enjoy any possible mixed drink. Pimm's Cup specials, the eagle flies on Saturday, closed Sunday. We have peanuts every way—baked, boiled, raw, salted-in-the-shell. We feature Miss Derando and Little Toni doing their delicate short-horn work. They are true and pure styling.

Boiled the last of my D-meat pouches and made a bitter broth.

How sorry to hear it on the radio, Kenny Cubus is dead again, gone to sleep with the window open in the cool of the ides, and a grackle has flown in, and pecked at the lenses of his goggles.

Oneba is One. Celebrate National Week!

I've rolled my *Halflife Times* into a cone, I've looked out at things, clocked time, been on watch. It goes something like this: vintage, fog, sleet, snow, rain, wind, seed, blossom, pasture, harvest, heat, and then the fruiting, should the frost stay on the pumpkin long enough, and the possum piss crescents in the new-fallen snow. If the goats lie in the field, and if the chimney smoke sinks to the level of the rye, then a painful winter is afoot.

So many of us afraid to death of the flocculus, as we sidestep those who have them, and wonder what their purpose is, hanging like a windsock, an elephant's trunk, in front of the face, at one glance seeming membranous and opaque, at another like canvas or cheesecloth.

I have a low stinkfire here, a screw of acrid smoke twisting

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from it, of shiplap and old newspaper, cooking a ball of D-meat on the end of a curtain rod, squatted in front of the Church of the Ark, saying my beads, mouthing a common prayer.

As you remember, reader, Kenny Cubus returned from the dead more than twenty years ago in the pages of *Halflife Times,* the first of the *trochilic* 'necronauts'. Today Kenny is as alive as you or me, busy jotting his impressions of the refrigerated rooms, the silent years of frosty discomfort, his breath gathered in a flocculus, like a hive of cotton candy, between his coonlike eyes and his automatic pencil.

Chewed off the head of a big devilhopper, let it sit like a hot pepper on my tongue, then washed it away with a bottle of La Perla.

A Kabuki star is dead here, *requiescat in pace.* Mitsuguro Bando, noted Kabuki actor, one of Halflife's most precious treasures, has died of swellfish poisoning at a restaurant in this City. After his performance he dined with fans on seafood at the Mexico Lindo and on remarking about particularly tasty puffer he collapsed, his cheeks engorged and pathologically distended. No doubt they'll perform a restoration and stuff him in a cubby at the City reliquary.

I jog the time away at Halflife, waterwell to waterwell, palmetto to palmetto, and do easy acrobatics, daily life a simple parcourse.

Water blister on the cock, another paralyzing Sunday.

Oneba is finally dead. Found moribund in his bedclothes, wrapped like a mummy. One of us will have to drape him with the flag and wake him, say the words, get the body ready. We'll need dung and pinestraw, palm oil and vinegar, a quart of Florida water, a bit of sawdust, according to his

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instructions.

Cricket fiddles under the loquat, a ring of dead fruit below the fig. Beyond the stone fence my hog, my goats, gaze stuporously at a hungry moon. Devilhoppers have eaten my iceberg, squash bugs cover my cantaloupes in a dark and seething envelope. Found a blue phosphorescent slime streaked the length of the trailer home.

Trochilics believe that eating a dog's heart, even goat or pony, will cause a child to grow up notably expulsive, phlegmatic, and given to hysteric depressions.

White worm in the morning stool.

The waterwells of Halflife reek of sulphur and rotted egg, but the day's eyes are all about, the wasps asleep in the legustrum, and *pannaeolus subbalteatus* strung beside the endless miles of pony roads.

The elevated railcars of the Historic Area, which at one time rolled in silence over the City on wide, soft wheels, now sit like the vacant husks of cicadas above our heads. Twenty-five thousand stand in the mud of an empty lot, awaiting a miracle, watching a nine-year-old boy, Kenny Cubus, pray at an improvised altar on the crest of a bluff. It is the sixteenth night Kenny has seen Oneba's head balloon up behind a row of sodden warehouses and in moments stretch formlessly across the Northern sky. At seven p.m. the boy rode through the waiting crowd on the shoulders of a neighbor, the ugly flocculus emerging like a snout, a feed bag, from his face. A soldier with his eyes blinded by flash, hysterics, a general swell of unfortunates and grotesques, were admitted through the crowd so they could stand nearest the altar, which was transformed from the pile of wooden crates, coffee cans, and scrap cardboard it had been, into a hill of flowers, statuettes, and dozens of candles. A whisper spread in the lot, "Look,

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he isn't getting wet, the rain does not touch him." But those who were closest could see the droplets glistening on his dark hair and blue sweater as he knelt in trance. We saw the boy shiver, his head dipping awkwardly forward, the flocculus bursting on contact with an altar crate, spilling out a pinkish jell, and a kind of yolk, which settled like a baseball in the mud. The gathering, which before this had been ahum with good feeling, was now perceptibly grave and still. We felt Oneba's hand buried in our cockles, opening like a rose, and we heard the familiar chopping litany of bony wings.

For some time past, a hut constructed of railroad ties, the crevices filled with old carpets, a roof of scrap tin, attracted the attention of pedestrians on American Street, in Halflife. The hut itself was not the only object of remark, but the fact that a crowd of *trochilics* daily held seances, clucking henlike in their fancy tongue, within its walls, and this excited workingmen in adjoining factories and mills. On June 3, Willy Spangenberg, a lad living on York Street, was killed in front of the place, a broken La Perla bottle pushed deeply into the throat, perhaps an accidental fall, more likely not. With this death the frequenters of the hut have dispersed and the structure razed to the ground. This reporter has seen four o'clocks sprouting up now, in the very spot where Willy lay, and tufts of rabbit grass surrounding it all.

Wilbur Wright, aeroplanist, selected Halflife for his experiments, now is injured, and will probably file civil complaint. He was painfully scalded on the chest and arms yesterday as a result of the bursting of a water tube while he was testing the mechanism of his aircraft. The boiling water scalded Wright, who fainted in pain. He recovered and walked to the Hotel La Coste on Cherry Avenue, where he drank La Perla and slept comfortably until awakened.

Hundreds of coot, what we call the trench duck, were found dead or dying along the levee of the trenchway. Ac-

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cording to fishermen, the stricken birds, blood dripping from their beaks, crawled ashore or onto the decks of barges to die. Postmortems showed an absence of any visual organ damage, all the viscera being intact, except the lungs, which were puffy, fluid-filled, and eroded. In addition, the heart and major arteries showed a markable lack of blood.

Come to Halflife.

Celebrate National Week.

Oneba is One.

A young *trochilic* girl of Halflife is described in recent *Halflife Times* articles. She is Julienne H., from whose body dozens of needles are being extracted. The girl complained of considerable irritation of the skin, of itching rashes. A Halflife physician found a number of needles protruding from various parts of her body. He extracted them with pincers. The girl has, since that time, produced 143 needles from her arms, hands, breast, buttocks, feet, the lobe of the ear, her eyelids, and the corner of the right eye. This *trochilic* experiences no pain until she feels needles penetrating the epidermis. The needles emerge invariably thick-end-first, and unless immediately extracted, disappear again. Physicians say that needles inserted under the skin were known to have been borne through the muscles in many cases, to come to rest in distant parts from the place of origin, but there is no record of a needle introduced to the stomach, as they presume Julienne H.'s were, emerging from the ear, in a way that the needle must have traversed the skull, which is incomprehensible.

At Halflife we are shooting for an economic self-sufficiency and a healthy proportion of non-mechanical mobility. The general idea is to live as parasites on a herd of ponies and a pack of dogs and to get around either in our pedalcars or on

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pony backs. These are the easiest animals to handle in this way. The pony should be the size of the Indian and Mongol pony, about 13 hands, about 800 lbs. My family of six will need 12 mares and three or four geldings and stallions for heavy work. The ponies provide milk, meat and transport, and will take us through the backstreets, where a pedalcar won't go. These ponies provide cartage as well as hide for tents, harnesses, and ropes. The dogs provide meat and fur to make sleeping bags and warm winter clothing when we're on the road. Twelve mares should produce 12 colts a year. Butchered when they are nine months, at an average weight of 200 lbs., we have 2400 lbs. of meat to consume. We use a pressure cooker to reduce the bones and extra strips of hide, if any, down to an edible soup which we either feed to the dogs or eat ourselves if we have to. The most valuable part here is the living tissue locked into the mineral structure of the bone. Boiling down joints, hocks, hooves provides us with an oil to waterproof the 90-150 square feet of hide we get from 12 colts. We have nine ponies so far and we've named them after the Muses. We live as nomadic squatters and we do love our beasts, despite all. Oneba is.

Gloria Hurd, a 29-inch *trochilic* woman, has given birth to an 18-inch, five lb., nine oz. daughter, called Florinda, who physicians say is normal in every way. The mother and child are reported doing well, after birth by Cesarean section. Miss Hurd is called Tiny Tina in the band of familiars with which she travels. The father, she says, is a City man of average height and build.

We have forgotten the grand flocculus, Oneba's head rolling City to City, Muncie to Loma Linda, to so many like a medicine ball inflamed, to others a moon of Jupiter, his wide moronic smile the darkest feature, his radiance blinding to look at, and thus in his providence created the national trench, whose dim green water sustains us, in its way, though one man told this reporter that his frail daughter has come

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down with blisters of the mouth and lip after drinking a quaff of it.

A pony cart rattled on the brickwork of Cherry Avenue, a *trochilic* tooting a kazoo in the back of it, selling hot waffles. I bought two of them, served in a waxed paper bag, dripping with cane syrup and snowbound in generous amounts of powdered sugar. I sat on the stoop of a burned out curio shop and ate them. Their warmth radiated through my silver teeth. I happened to turn to look inside the shop, where I could see a rubber companion pallid and half deflated, hung by a clothespin from a nail in a cindered doorpost.

Normally I eat a cube of D-meat in the morning, or have a sliver of skrada-kaka, a bottle of La Perla, and then I sit in my deck chair on the trailer home's little porch and read my *Halflife Times*.

I see *trochilics* smoking birdwings over pinestraw in Centrola Park, fishing tainted carp from the trench, and otherwise strutting and fretting and firing their teetotums at our ankles, with a frightening suddenness, from the black alleyways, in the middle of these long, cool, Halflife nights.

Oneba is One. Celebrate National Week.

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James McMichael

from Four Good Things

No sleep for either of us on the flight to
Maine and then to Gatwick. From the train, backyard
allotments and co-operatives, the city hardly
there at all outside Victoria and there inside it
only as a crowd. It's hot, of course, and everyone
just manages. We pass them in their queues. They need
maps and bookings, taxis, other trains. I try to think they
like some part of this. It would help me through the raw
worry of what to do if I could think they
liked it in some way I didn't. I ask about the
Grosvenor, and it's silly to have asked because it's
here, inside the station. We take our bags upstairs,
come down again, go out to look for dinner, eat,
come back and go to sleep. When I hear it, I know
first that it's coming from below, from that odd warm
hollow where the people were and where they must be now,
still purposeful and hearing differently this voice.
A woman's, young, it names in series all the single
destinations, platforms, times, then carries here with
nothing that disturbs me, nothing I can understand,
no word, with nothing lost, no listening and only
letting go, forgetting.

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It's rarely that easy. The ease of it has
little to do with how tired I am. If it's before
midnight, if there's still time enough to sleep,
I go to sleep. At two or three, when I wake up,
I have to be asleep again within an hour.
I shouldn't let it bother me. Even if I
don't go back to sleep, I shouldn't worry that I haven't
slept enough, that I'll feel it in my eyes. If my
tongue won't work, if it makes me slur the things I
press myself to say, I'll say just that much less.
I should ignore all day in what I do each
thought of myself and how I'm feeling tired.
I work at my breathing for awhile, listen to
Linda's and adopt it, a sleeper's breathing.
Mine would be slower. To breathe the way she breathes,
I'd have to be awake, and am, have been awake
too long now and have given up on trying to know
exactly what I should be doing, how I could be
thinking about it all and changing. So I don't
care if I go back to sleep. Since it never works to
care about it, since my calmness when I care is
feigned and crazy, I don't care. I'll get up.
I'm too tired to get up, I'll give up here. And even the
giving up is trying, a counterfeit that takes me into
harmless things, a seagull, my socks, into the drowse of
someone giving up who meets that first improbable
ellipsis, slips beyond it to a second and a third and,
losing count, goes off between the scatter, sleeps,
is someone who's asleep, not me at all, who's only
almost there and pleased to be this close, too pleased,
now coming to my hold again with all the shifts
intact and unrelieved. I've lost my chance.
Having been so close and missed, I can't start over.
Nor can I trust that even now I've given up.
I'm left remembering the times I've gone to sleep,
and what I've done each time is to forget.
It's happened before. I've slept. I was asleep an

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hour ago when nothing woke me, when I was simply
awake. I didn't have to see that it was still
too dark. To know I wasn't where I'd been
two nights ago, or one, Les Bouilladoires, Cassis,
I didn't have to hear inside my head the
syllables of Juan-les-pins. It might be different if
once for any fraction of that irreversible one
moment I could be unsure. If I had to sort through
where I was and was it time, if there were
sequence or change, some need to tell myself I'd
done it again—that for another night, and here,
again, impossibly, I'd placed myself too soon—
then I'd have doubted, sleep would have given me
doubt, resisted me a little, made me wait,
kept me for just that long from knowing that it's
me who brings this on and can't undo it, who won't
live it as it is, as mine. The certainty that
sleep isn't there is me. At angles, in
parentheses and stacks, my waking pulls me on
from this to that and this and I can't
stop them or go back or choose, they're all the
same to me, I make them all the same by
hating them for keeping me awake. Each part is my
excuse to be sure. It lets me prove that there are
others like itself, that I can be replacing it with
others, each itself replacing what I want until I'm
sure that I won't have it, sure that wanting sleep is
helplessly safe. Since sleep is all I want, there's
nothing else that I'm removed from. Wanting is a bore.
I can distract myself, contrive a lustful graphic
time of it and feel it take, my penis, by degrees,
my proof that things can change. It's more like
doing something to get up and walk. The bathroom door,
the light. Although I've taken it too many times, my
doing this can be a start. I spill them in my palm.
Fourteen. They're grainy and pale, a uniform
clear score across each face. This one. When it works,

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it's like a tiredness I take inside me. It
weakens and breaks, dissolves inside me in a
gradual prolonged slow carry into sleep.
It isn't tiredness. I'd have it to go
back to if it were. I'd trust it as a need.
I'd do what willing sleep won't let me do,
I'd rest between my tiredness and sleep and
wait for them to take me. I'd feel them
measure, as I came away, my heading toward.
Repeatably, on either side of sleep, there'd be a
time that I could wait for. Going either way, I'd
wait and be pleased. It would be time to be
awake now, time to sleep, my tired surmises
tired of themselves and me and, given up,
forgotten in my rest. It's my remembering that
tires me when I'm doing badly, doing what I'd
willed I wouldn't do again—the same embarrassing
explosion over nothing much, self-pity, fear.
I've willed too often that I wouldn't be afraid,
that I would quit my way of thinking
backwards from a safer time, the symptom or the threat
behind me then, the drive and its risk survived.
My going somewhere wouldn't be my getting
past it in time, past it to my staid, more certain
memory of how it was, of how my wanting
not to be afraid had tired me, made it hard to
start at any time with what was left. I miss the
steadiness I sometimes have that lets me
stop and go back, begin to choose, defer to
patience and surprise and incompleteness, loss, to
versions of things, the sense we follow when we're
talking to a friend and knowing that he
understands us, wants to tell us too a
story that he wouldn't tell if we'd been
with him all the time. There isn't time for stories,
there's too much. My friends aren't here, and I'm
forgetting what I meant to ask or tell them

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yesterday, the day before. And when it
matters that I try to keep it, when I
prop it with its mattering and call it up
again, another time, I feel it isn't
theirs anymore, it's mine, and it's too dear, I
keep it with the others that I've blurred and kept,
the dead ridiculous and grand collection all I
know about my time. I write to someone,
you. I say I like it here. I say that I'm confused.
I know these rifts and these delays are still
forgivably ahead, that I can start.
The differences we don't catch up with aren't the
incubi I make them be by wanting
always, all the time, a hold I don't
forgive myself for wanting. So I want something else.
I want my balance to be alternately
there and not, the way it is when I'm up
walking somewhere and forget my weight—
around me, and in balance, in the world,
the things I'll never think about or see.

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The Gift

Mark Strand

A man has died, but in his casket, in his skull's gray dungeon—the world's tiniest theater, his last thought remains. Down in the ghetto of the dead, the terminal second of an existence otherwise unimportant is kept in perpetuity.

Henry is about to walk out of his house into a night that is quickened with the radiant zeal of the stars and cautionary gaze of the moon. He is just under forty, and wears blue jeans, tee shirt, and loafers. His freedom can be measured by the eagerness of his eyes, his confinement by the distance of his hand from the doorknob. His one passion is to leave, to be out of the house. He has left the bed strewn with sheets half-fallen to the floor; clothes cascade from open drawers, chairs are heaped with towels, the floor is scattered with socks and underwear. It is a tableau of dishevelment whose duration he could not have foreseen.

In the scented summer night, in the damp, vegetative kingdom of Henry's garden, Cathy waits. She has run all the way from her house, without clothes. Panting lightly, staring

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at the door from which Henry will never emerge, Cathy seems cool, her flesh milk-tinted, phosphorescent, luxuriant. In the moon-drenched blaze of rhododendron, Iceland poppies, Persian buttercups, small ovals of shadow cascade over the spectral hills of her blue-white bottom. Poor Cathy! About to run in and get Henry, she has been years in a half-crouching, half-standing position, the recipient of unceasing moonlight pouring down.

It is as if Henry can see her there, can see that she has nothing on, for he carries a few of his wife's things on one arm, while his wife, Gloria, strangely serene in her silk kimono of exotic birds flashing their crimson and blue feathers in a green convenience of branches, sleeps in the chaos of the bedroom. She is a small jungle, a breathing heaven of birds immemorially lush, miraculously silent, settled upon the chalky dead-white expanse of the bed. She claims nothing of Henry's attention, whose eyes are fixed on the door that separates him from Cathy. Fateful attention! Had Henry not lost precious moments, grabbing some clothes for Cathy, he might now be gazing at her with undying pleasure instead of at the door.

Were it not ongoing, this might be a scene to remember; Henry and Cathy caught in positions that compromise them forever. The wrong moment, precisely the one that offers least satisfaction, is their immortality, fortune's rebuke to their intended indiscretion. Enacting a luminous version of our frailty, they are martyrs to passion, pilgrims trapped in the ghostly screen of a dead man's surviving thought.

And the dead man, does anyone know who he is? Was he Henry or dreaming up Henry? Whatever the case, the scene endures, its everlasting bloom a secret of the earth and of ourselves to whom it is revealed. For there are occasions when such truths are given to us, when we hear the barely palpable whirr of time's monotonous monologue and when we see, in the abyss, a house suddenly appear under the full moon of a summer night. It lasts for a second, as long as the dead man's undying image, but no one complains. It is a gift.

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Lawrence Kearney

Jacob & The Angel

1. At first, I thought I was an angel.
I was alone & the black air
hummed with moths with the smell
of creosote & flowering aloe & I
thought it was an angel.

It was my father.
I could tell by the stink
of garlic. And the weight,
heavy as only an old man can be.
That great belly rolling down
on my back, & my arms
flailing under him. And though I heaved
to rise out of being a son,
to be alive in another body
& cast him off, being a woman
or a stalk of wheat
or an angel myself,
he threw me back,
each time I'd almost risen
he threw me back,

& I was a man again.

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2. Kneeling there, under him,
I remembered a dream
from years before:

of a ladder entering heaven
on which the heavenly hosts
went up & came down, shimmering
with an icy light,
the way the river gets
sometimes under the moon.
And I wanted to speak with them,
they seemed so free of any
human concern or delight.

But when I fell to my knees
& begged them to take me,
they laughed, & climbed back
toward heaven & would not
let me touch them.
All but the last one—
who hesitated, then turned
around, bent close
to my ear & whispered
get up, you fool—
you can't climb a ladder
on your knees.

3. It was then I rose up
& threw my father to the ground.
Where he kissed my thighs, my feet,
saying *let me go, it's almost dawn,*
let me go & I can bless you.
But I was his own best son,
& would not forgive him.

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I trampled him there
for over an hour. Stomped him
& stomped him till I could feel his soul
moving beneath me & he no longer
cried out. And in that hour
all bitterness between us
was gone . . . In its place
there was only the music
of repudiation, a clear song
like the women sing by the well
as they haul the bucket in.
As the sun was, just then,
hauling its bucket of light
over the hills to the east
& I could see my enemy
at last.

But who knows
what I saw. It could have been
anyone—the ruined face, the caved-in
chest like the body of a bird—
though it was a man's body,
I'm sure of it. A man.
Somebody's father.
A pot-bellied angel
neither the sky nor earth
would claim.

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Two Poems by Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Notice of Loss

To lose your hair, to lose your temper,
if you see what I mean, your precious time,
to fight a losing battle,
losing height and lustre, sorry,
never mind, to lose on points,
let me bloody well finish,
to lose blood, father and mother,
to lose your heart, lost long ago
in Heidelberg, all over again,
without batting an eye, the charm
of novelty, forget it, to lose
your civil rights, I get the message,
to lose your head, by all means,
if it can't be helped,
to lose Paradise Lost, what next,
your job, the Prodigal Son,
to lose face, good riddance,
two World Wars, one molar,
half a stone of overweight,
to lose, lose, and lose again, even
your illusions lost, long ago,
so what, let's not waste another word
on love's labour lost, I should say not,
to lose sight of your lost sight,
your virginity, what a pity, your keys,
what a pity, to get lost in the crowd,
lost in thoughts, let me finish,
to lose your mind, your last penny,
no matter, I'll be through in a moment,
your lost causes, all sense of shame,
everything, blow by blow,
alas, even the thread of your story,
your driver's license, your soul.

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Identity Check

This is not Dante.
This is a photograph of Dante.
This is a film showing an actor who pretends to be
Dante.
This is a film with Dante in the role of Dante.
This is a man who dreams of Dante.
This is a man called Dante who is not Dante.
This is a man who apes Dante.
This is a man who passes himself off as Dante.
This is a man who dreams that he is Dante.
This is a man who is the spitt'n image of Dante.
This is a wax figure of Dante.
This is a changeling, a double, an identical twin.
This is a man who believes he is Dante.
This is a man everyone, except Dante, believes to be Dante.
This is a man everyone believes to be Dante, only he
himself does not fall for it.
This is a man no one believes to be Dante, except Dante.
This is Dante.

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Celia Gilbert

Eurydice's Song

There is no returning,
This he would not see.
How in this darkness,
Darker than he had imagined it to be,
I had sloughed off
Everything he had wanted for us,
Had seen our lives
As an endless rise and fall
Of small desires.

Not love in his arms,
But the ecstasy of a great pine
Rising above us,
Or the sun in an autumn sky—
Effects he worked so hard for—
There were those moments.
But what are they
Compared to the crystal
The dead become, growing
All knowledge into one,
And light blazes from our sides
A light the living cannot see.

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I followed him upwards
Along the narrow way, reluctantly,
As one who would be forced
To know old pains and sorrow.
How often he had sung
Of mankind's woes, not mine,
For I was there for him
And from my heart he rose day after day
Renewed to make his songs
Adored, followed, himself
By lesser poets sung.

There was nothing I cared
To return to. He chattered
Like a child, reminding me
Of this and that thing we'd done.
Then, was it his impatient nature
Or a sudden glimpse
Into my shrouded silence made him pause?
Wasn't it a clutching unease
That we'd outgrown each other
Made him turn, as I knew he must
The moment before the light would burst
On my sealed eyes?
And I was free, and he,
Half-divining, understood
The trials yet to come,
The outraged women
And the river's flood.

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Stephen Tapscott

Oats

I stood by the dark barn and called
and called to her by name,
into the labyrinth of stalls
and webs and smells, where I could see
nothing in the bent light. And when she came
she came bowing to me

out of the darkness,
bending her neck through the half-gate
to test my purposes:
winter-rugged, high-eared, calm
and skeptical of gifts. Her breath
spread its fur across my palm

as I offered it, the ball of her nose
worked nimble as fingers: she picked
at the oats
I held out scrupulously,
as though they might be attached
to my skin in some secret human way

she couldn't see. When they were gone,
as evenly as she'd come
she turned
and walked off into the barn
and left me watching. So I never learned
more than she'd offered:

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whether she was sheltering
a coldwater foal, putting herself
between me and the breathing
fact, unused to the December air
and the strange hands and the mansmell
I carried; or whether an old fear

pulled her away; or whether
the barn was simply empty
and out of the wind, familiar
as I wasn't, when the oats were finished.
It wasn't nostalgia, nor mystery,
nor pity for a creaturely loss

I stood with
when she turned,
bending like a great fish,
and leaned back into the dark.
But it was distant and familiar:
the oakchaff sprinkled its sting

across my fingers and I recognized,
advancing, what I hadn't guessed:
that we had come to this, here, this.

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Two Poems by Katha Pollitt

Seal Rock

They won't come to you. These nights, you could sit for
a year
on the dock behind Arthur's Gift Shop and General Store
before you'd spot with your flashlight
a single silk-backed bather
nosing the trash fish dumped off the lobster boats,
lured to your human light from the night-black water.

Those visits, if they ever took place, ended long ago,
though the fishermen did no harm
to the silver-furred luck-bearing ones
who kept the cold caves we left and the waves no squall
spills the green-glass fullness of—
and even half-believed the old tales:

how they floated this drowner, nudged that skiff off rocks.
We bore them, perhaps. Or simply, their minds are
elsewhere.
At any rate, no girl
has married their king in centuries,
no sailor learned any secret from them worth shipwreck.

And yet, as the holiday ferry
smacks its smart salt-stiffened flags in the wind
we lean like children over the side: to lee
gleams the craggy castle to which they've withdrawn.
Huge, simple, sleek as bronzes, they
sprawl in the sun, or powerfully dive
and surface jewelled with spray,

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then lumber with heavy grace back up to their mates.
They are historyless, at peace. As our boat chuffs by,
the wind floats back fish stench
and a gabble of barks, sharp cries
that remind you of nothing but gulls or the creaking of
rope.
They are no sirens, we only weekend adventurers.
Whatever their language, they are not speaking to us.

Wild Escapes

("escape: a cultivated plant run wild"
—Webster)

Every night they went a little farther.
Restless, too hot to sleep
under the too-bright quilts she had made as a girl
the farmer's wife imagined she could hear them
slipping away like daughters
over the rough stone wall
across the pasture, onto the lonely hills.
And nothing stayed:
the stars wheeled from her window,
the great pines waited, black, at the edge of the field,
and even these flowers, familiar
delicate umbels and traceries,
Queen Anne's Lace, brought all the way from England,
refused to comfort her
preferred
to flaunt themselves in every ragged ditch,
lie down on bare cold stone—
as though in this raw air
a darker seed
drove on a starker, more essential white.

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Two Poems by Reginald Gibbons

The Cedar River

For Mark Haverland

You bring the Red Devil back fast,
left wrist whirling in the circle
as the line fills the spool—
back from the water near reeds
where at the end of a long arc
it landed with a pop and leapt toward you.
It zags, jerks, darts, describes
a progress so quick
no nerves could catch it. Then
a tail-swirl ruffles the surface . . .
and another pass, so high
the fins break through.
The marauding head—
eyes as low as the long jaw
that will snap sideways out of what
seems pure spite—rushes up
but the shape of the canoe
clouds its heaven and it panics.
The big splash of the escape
comes over the gunwale
and the lure hangs in its wake,
teasing the delicate tip of the rod
that nods like an innocent stalk of wild rice.

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At Noon

The thick-walled room's cave-darkness,
cool in summer, soothes
by saying, This is the truth, not the taut
cicada-strummed daylight.
Rest here, out of the flame—the thick air's
stirred by the fan's four
slow-moving spoons; under the house the stone
has its feet in deep water.
Outside, even the sun-god, dressed in this life
as a lizard, abruptly rises
on stiff legs and descends blasé toward the shadows.

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Jane Cooper

House Poem

Why do I see my house as a second body?
The disposition of the bed
like a hungry mouth? the dining room table
like the eye of Cyclops,
my third eye, the truth-teller,
perpetual Thanksgiving gathering all in?

Whoever knocks here, you enter a palpable skin.
All I ask is respect
for this skin of marble, walnut, leather, linen; this hair
of geranium leaves with its faint, dry breath;
even the vulgar conversation
of the air conditioner.
I am as vulnerable
to your least touch as a wandering clove of dust.

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Two Poems by Alfred Corn

Interior

So many verticals, and
How every object is a bar
To thought, the table
Not cleared away.

An emptied wineglass
White windows reflect in
Billowing like sails.
Plate of the finished meal—

Knife; salt; the seated body
Opposite suddenly adding up
To two glass eyes
In as many dimensions, depth

Just a change from large to small.
Afternoon begins indirectly
With brine burns of light
From behind. Nothing can stop it.

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One To One

Unwrap the message hidden in a wound
Or a word: a branching spray of avowals, cut,
Massed, left to glide deathward in a vase . . .
Face to face, a match, together until we choose;
And afterwards as well, isn't too much to hope for.
Still no sign of the chance to balance off
Independence and devotion—the armature jangled,
Door-and telephone-bell, errand, project,
A wave hello-goodbye on the fraying wing.
Unmeasurable, the drag of countered origins,
The wind-chill factor, circumstantial walls.
There's always been a question, too,
Of satire mixed in with the mortar
Of our homemade, honeyed, subfusc nougat.
Faithful in your detachment, clear-eyed, marooned;
This you reserve to me—the person in the round,
A dark, and then the light side of the earth,
Warmth that spreads at a touch, as at dawn;
The play, the heft and pungency. Prized.
Best, I think, to leave chiaroscuro alone.
(And classify your cub or mooncalf name
Along with much else so sacredly banal
It has to take the reasonable vow of silence.)
A fresh effort sends me prospecting for clues,
Browsing in your empty study, paneled
With research and labor, leather, faded gold,

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Patriarchal tobacco. Lamplight does and doesn't
Sum up a mind's household. Nor are you among those
Most at ease when being photographed or described.
In no uncertain terms, spleen, tinder,
Everready rejoinder when a mood strikes,
Head in flames, the shaft breaking smartly in two.
Your turn or mine to lay it out again,
How the all-intent have trouble conceding even
The clearest-cut foul, the pang's too sharp? Who,
When the smoke clears this time, will be missing
In action? One half, contracted to an unavoidable sky.
By magic you come back, gleam and scattered debris;
Pencil in hand, the cigarette sketching gestures
As gauze floats upward, unfurled, as the sun
Goes down. Free of one more day; and how much striving.
Remains the tireless need to be reimaged,
Where we were, where we are, the wide-ranging seesaw
Of the team, in full array, a full-blooded portrait.
What questions don't dissolve in a green-brown gaze.
Focus: the doorframe opposite, by three-quarter light,
Aplomb poised on the balls of your feet, the elbows
You nurse, and—just this once—the gravest of smiles.
The album fills, it grows substantial;
Superseded, replaced, updated, changed—
The candid, casual arrangements made.

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Laugh Kookaberry, Laugh Kookaberry, Gay Your Life Must Be

John Domini

Much later on, long after Judgment Day, we remembered that a man had once passed through here and then returned, still living, to the world. Across the lightning and malefic smoke of Hell the news travelled. A human man! Only *passing through!*

Among all my fellow devils the one I most often conversed with, at this time of the news of the escaped man, was a polymorph named Miplip. I had no choice about talking with him. He was my overseer. In his natural state he possessed a hideous face: scaly, pendulous cheeks and a long nose with a circular tip and the nostrils on the tip. I had heard it said that the inspiration for his looks came from an ancient river turtle of South America, but this of course could not be, for Miplip had been created eons before either the turtle or the river in which, until Judgment Day, the creature had made its home.

He was my overseer. Still, still it rankles. In our Division there was Miplip and I, only we two, though there were visitors, and he—he was the one in charge. Everywhere devils

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work in twos; one must be in charge. Then why should it hurt so? Miplip, Miplip. Our relationship was oppressive.

Why did you argue with me, perpetually shaking your brittle cheeks? They made a rustling sound, and anyway I conceded every point, sooner or later. Why the heartless flaunting of your superiority? I concede: you have all the advantages. Don't you think we have been at it together long enough for me to know? I concede that your tongue is longer than mine and that the inside of your mouth is a nastier yellow. I concede that your polymorphism dwarfs anything I am capable of. Then why should I be reminded, again and again? Mip*lip*. The nagging. The nicknames. The shapes you sometimes assumed, just to delude me. The jokes far over my head. The remarks to others. Everywhere devils work in twos, and one must be in charge. Therefore I needed you; I could never be in charge. But what did you need, to cause me such pain?

Yet Miplip and I, like all other devils, discussed this new development (or rather, this newly-remembered old development): a man who had slipped our grasp and returned to the world unharmed. On some occasions Miplip and I were lucky; our conversation would be more of a discussion and less of a harangue. On other occasions, unlucky, the reverse. But we did talk, like all the others, and we asked those demons who came by what they thought. The general response was confused, halting, even pessimistic. Some avoided the question altogether, darting away before we had finished so much as a single sentence about the escaped man. A troubling situation, especially in the light of all the other worries we had been suffering recently. Then came the day that one of our regular visitors, a sightless demon whom Miplip and I both regarded as a friend, rendered himself invisible in order to escape us. After that, Miplip made a suggestion—a suggestion, as it turned out, of monumental proportions.

He had his tail curled about him at the time, and he sat on the air, maintaining levitation by a gentle flapping of his

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wings. He seemed unusually subdued. The blind devil's exertions in bursting out of sight had left a brown stain on the air, just over Miplip's head.

"Lover," my overseer began quietly, though he was using one of his most offensive nicknames for me, "no one knows who this passerby was, as yet?"

"No one, Miplip." I stood on a boulder nearby, disconsolately knocking off flinders with my fork into the damned below. That particular nickname, Lover, is so offensive to me because it is so duplicit. "But I have heard he had a guide, someone from among those already dead in his time. Yes, I think this is generally accepted as true now. He had a guide, from Limbo, just above us."

"From Limbo."

"A non-Christian. Surely *you* know."

I was pleased to be one up on him, and not a little surprised. But instead of sneering and challenging my news he continued to sit where he was, in silence. The brown stain faded and disappeared. When at last Miplip spoke, it was thoughtfully:

"We could make use of this man, Lover. The mere mention of him might make an excellent torture."

I left off swinging at the chips of rock and turned to face him. "Look here, Miplip, it seems to me that 'the mere mention' of a human being who got away would be joyful news to these souls."

To debate with him was pointless; innumerable experiences had taught me that I lacked even the shadow of a particle of a maggot of hope. *He had won every argument since Lucifer's Fall.* And yet. . . once again I experienced the wretched excitement, the stirring of a spirit that will not be held still, the baffling resurgence of—what *was* it? It overwhelmed me, every time Miplip and I began to heave our opinions back and forth. Uselessly I struggled to keep quiet and let him say what he had to say. That scrambling monotony inside me took over. In the thrill of discovering that there were *two points of view here,* Miplip's and my own, an

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eternity of lost arguments dropped out of my memory. In other words, I became an idiot.

"You *say,* Miplip!" I shouted, banging the heel of my fork on the boulder. "You say he will cause pain?"

At that Miplip shook off his introspection. He laughed derisively, showing the yellow inside of his mouth. It was a nastier yellow than my own, and his tongue was much longer.

"Lover? 'You *say?*' What do you say, Little Gash? You have an idea? *You* are thinking? I doubt it, Cunt. Listen to me."

At least I am not alone in my miserable enthusiasm for arguing. Debate is the most avidly pursued activity in Hell. This is not an exaggeration. I have never seen two devils get together and not immediately take up some pro and con to occupy their leisure time. If a third demon joins them, he will find a middle ground suitable for contention. Miplip, too, took obvious pleasure in it—devastatingly obvious.

"Now Lover, see if you can follow what I am saying. I will use small words. I will pronounce them slowly. How..."

"Miplip, I have a mind as good as yours!"

I was an idiot.

"Blasphemer!" My overseer cried. "And the One in the ice below? Your vocabulary is equal to His?"

I kicked the rock beneath me. Miplip assumed a commiserating look.

"Dear boy, who was put in charge here?"

I looked down, and scratched and pawed for a moment or two, but finally I pointed at my overseer with the handle of my fork.

"Who, boy?"

I unwrapped one finger from around the handle and pointed it, too, at him. I had no one else to appeal to, no one else at all.

"Well all right, since we are not speaking. Now perhaps you could show me who—or Who—set me in charge."

With my free hand I pointed downward, exaggeratedly

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and repeatedly. One should never be uncertain about Who is running the show.

"Lover, I hope I have made my point clear? Well yes? So then, small words: How . . . do . . . you . . . know . . . what . . . our . . . pri-son-ers . . . think? Can . . . you . . . hear . . . them?"

He then outlined for me the main points of his amazing suggestion.

The great problem in Hell is that since the Last Day we have been incapable of communicating with the souls under our jurisdiction. Before the trumpet blew, when they were all merely spirits like us, we could hear their screams, their lamentations, their boasts, their pleas, and their empty threats. When we wished to, we could speak with them. But the reunion with their bodies, though it went off without a hitch, spoiled all that.

As was the plan, at the Final Reckoning the numberless hosts of the damned were reinserted in the bodies they had worn on earth and then one by one hurled back down into his or her designated area of the Pit and locked away from the face of God forever. I watched from the far left-hand corner of the assembly; even at that distance it was an impressive spectacle. The excruciating mental torment of that fall! And the physical pain of the landing! And then to waken, not only still alive but never to die again, never even to sleep, on a desert beneath rains of fire . . . or in the putrid slime . . . or the burning ice . . . .

A masterful plan. In all the debating I have heard, never once has anyone disputed the beautiful piece of work that was Judgment Day. But then I am consigned to one Division here; it would be incorrect of me to speak for all demons and all Hell.

Thus the infinite project began well, and it was a long time before our confidence eroded, even so little as to allow us to notice that we could no longer hear what our charges were saying. Did a demon think he recognized a certain body and try to torment it with questions rather than his fork? Did the problem suddenly dawn on that far-sighted devil—some

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smart bastard like Miplip—as he saw his scarred or mutilated or burning victim's mouth open and close soundlessly? I myself can remember reflecting, very long ago, that something seemed to be missing. Yet I admit, I concede, that the situation remained mystifying to me until Miplip explained it. For once, he did not claim complete authorship: he acknowledged that the information came not straight from him but from the demons guarding the monstrous City of Dis, where the Heretics are kept. Miplip is allowed to descend that far; my own limit is higher.

Our first reaction was to go at our tasks with renewed energy. It is not necessary to hear screams in order to know a body is in pain. We put aside our quarreling and, for immeasurable ages, spoke only to suggest some new kind of mercilessness, or to point out those we had missed. But at length our confidence ebbed still lower. We were simply not getting the proper response. Miplip might change into a huge, furious wasp, stinging at will, but the reaction would be little more than a slight agitation. And was that a smile—a *smile*—I sometimes saw on the faces of those unlucky humans I now and again hoisted high into the air and then let fall, down to the rocky floor of Hell? A smile?

I never had a body and so have no way of knowing its capacities, but Miplip was one of the many who had worked temporary assignments on earth combatting the forces of righteousness and faith. He wondered (and, of course, bullied me into wondering as well) if there were not limits to physical suffering. He postulated "the development of an anticipatory psychological uplift," and "deprivation of pleasurable stimuli," by which devious phrases he meant, in so far as he let me penetrate his meaning, that whatever pain we inflicted was, with the passage of time, *wearing off.* In fact, Miplip feared that we might even be giving our prisoners some small measure of happiness.

There followed a concerted attempt to learn to read the lips of the damned. We received the orders from the City of Dis. For centuries Miplip and I howled and roared at the damned,

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the idea being that one of them might shout back at us in words we could understand. But our verbal abuse elicited no more than a perfunctory response; the attempt failed everywhere. The variety of human languages and the vastness of time since any devil had heard human speech proved obstacles too great to overcome.

And now came this awful news about the human passerby. As if we needed anything more to make us feel impotent, outsmarted, and ridiculous! The existence of such a person certified a deficiency.

Thus it was a low and worrying moment in our history, when Miplip made his suggestion. Smart, Miplip, very smart. But doubtless, as had been the case previously, bright fiends all over Hell had already hit upon the same idea, before you.

As always, he drew out his points to cruel, tantalizing lengths. I was asked a thousand leading questions, and gave a million wrong answers. Hell's principle and outstanding quality, my overseer asked, was what? Its utter absence of earthly pleasures? Correct. This absence was the reason it had come to be in the first place. But now...

"*But,*" Miplip thundered at me, "does memory have its limits?"

"I—"

"*Does it?*"

"Memory—"

"Imbecile. Respond!"

"Yes it does. Yes. I can't remember when we first met."

"Correct. Neither can I, neither can I, though my memory's a damn sight better than yours." He flashed his tongue, showed the yellow inside of his mouth. "So then Lover, pay attention puh-leeze: if pleasure is nowhere to be found, one can become accustomed to pain? Respond!"

If pleasure was nowhere to be found, one could become accustomed to pain. All Hell had become routine, to our charges. The abyss was their home; they had forgotten the world.

I found it unbelievable that we had gone so long without

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realizing this simple fact. My overseer's lecture had hurt, but I felt more astonishment—bewilderment—than anger or pain. For some unremembered time I stood on my boulder thunderstruck. At length I discovered myself, gazing down at my fork. I was holding the tool, my tool, in both my hands, and I had been looking at it so hard it felt as if the weight of my eyes had increased. The fork had been given to me at the dawn of creation, shaped in one piece out of an inexistent alloy: a weapon, an *instrument of torture.*

I began gasping, speaking: "Miplip... how could we not have considered... Miplip, our job, our job... myself, I, this is all I've ever..."

Who else was there to appeal to? I looked up at my overseer.

He had remained where he was, sitting on air, but he had unwound his tail. Now it flexed lazily beneath him. He looked at me in silence a while, then suddenly made a short speech.

"Don't blame yourself," he said. "The whole structure is filled with silly types. Oh, yes it is, Lover. The entire place. We have silliness above us and silliness locked in the ice below."

That was an odd speech, for him. The contemptuous debater's edge was gone from the words. Odd, too, was the philosophy espoused. But oddest of all... well, we hear devils all the time; we can talk to all the devils we want... well, lately I had been trying to recall the exact sound of a human voice. What was it like, once, so long ago? And in all my remembering, and as much as I had tried, sneaking off by myself, to capture that special timbre, I never came so close as Miplip did during his odd speech. This may be significant, in the light of later events.

My overseer was quick about returning to his old self: "So, Lover, what do we have to say now? Listen to me, Baggage! I would say we have time enough, wouldn't you? Tick-tock, tick-tock, savvy? Time enough to change our rather *high*-pitched tune, hah? Respond!"

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"Yes Miplip."

"Yes indeed; time to make them scream again. What our good people need, Lover," he broadened his nostrils in anticipation, "is a reminder of what they've left behind!"

So began the next great cycle of torture.

Miplip put his protean abilities to fuller use than ever before. He was a thoughtful father with money in his hand; he was a dear, small pony; he was a kind white-haired matron wearing a gray sweater with maroon trim; he was a voluptuous girl dancing; he was a gleaming new building lit up for the holidays; he was a bush in bloom.

Myself, I am incapable of wizardry like that, but I did make use of a small talent for projecting visible images. It requires enormous concentration and a continual up-and-down pumping motion with my head and shoulders, very tiring. Prior to this time I had used the gift rarely, and then only as a vent for my more frightened or sadder moods, because I thought the monsters and bilious landscapes thus created would strike terror into my charges. I had done it, for example, when I was lonely. But now, with Miplip's guidance (for I repeat, I had never visited the world above), I painted the interiors of Hell with grain fields, with rows of fruit shined and on display, with city streets at evening swarming with living souls, with human youngsters in clusters playing games, with sailboats on blue waters, and a great deal else. I was ceaselessly reminded that my renderings were somewhat stylized, but Miplip frolicked about in them nonetheless, "bringing them to life," as he put it. As if such sheer variety —I was astounded; what a *world* there had been!—needed anything more.

At first, in order to be sure of the efficiency of our new tack, we had to descend among the damned and inspect our audience after each show. They were not writhing, or clawing at their eyes and hair, or biting themselves in a mad frenzy, as they had done earlier, and so we had to investigate. It was up-

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setting to walk among them—so near, so repugnant and so fascinating at once. Could we possibly understand them? How did we ever hope to know what caused them pain? Would they *never speak?* But then Miplip and I discovered they were weeping. Open, unchecked; it had been millenia at least since we had seen such weeping. We looked closely, making sure, because as devils we lacked the physiological tools necessary for crying. When we saw their puffed, blinking, quivering eyelids, and their wet cheeks and lips and chins, we rejoiced. Their silence was not free from pain.

We took to punishing our audience immediately after each show, as a vivid reminder—made more vivid by what they had just seen—of where they were and where they would stay (on the negative side, this did seem to stop their weeping; they did not weep as we beat them). Then we added music to our charades. The single earthly tune Miplip could recall was a mere jingle, something he said he once heard a boy singing to a girl, but he sang it nonetheless. Assuming the form of a sweet-looking girl, on a swing perhaps, or sometimes even in the form of both children, wrapped in each other's arms, Miplip would then screech out, malevolently, in his harsh and lowdown devil's voice:

> Kookaberry sitting in the old gum tree:
> Merry, merry king of the bush is he.
> Laugh Kookaberry, laugh Kookaberry,
> Gay your life must be.

With all these new cooperative ventures, the relationship between Miplip and myself changed. I say it changed, but I cannot define that change with any real precision. We never became friendly, exactly. My overseer never once accepted any of my proposals for our shows, not without first altering it enough to call the proposal his own, and I continued to slip away by myself and try to speak in a human voice, so that I might hear once again that forgotten sound, echoing among the stony retreats of my world. Yet the relationship *did*

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change. I do believe that the ferocity of his insults declined, and the number of them as well, but that is only a feeling. And so the one concrete proof of our changed relationship that I can offer—if indeed it is concrete proof, if indeed it was a changed relationship—is the fact that Miplip and I became lovers.

By accident, during an unusually lengthy show, I discovered that if my designs were done with proper force they would remain as they were for a good long while, without my attention. I began joining Miplip onstage, after that. At first, having nothing better to do, we depicted the story of that man who had passed through unscathed. Miplip played both he and his guide (they were reporters of some kind, investigators, we had learned by then), linked at the hands, while I did my best to represent the many fearsome torments of Hell. Our goal was to stir up jealousy and despair in our audience, but it just seemed unrealistic to expect *only* jealousy and despair—that is, jealousy and despair unmixed with a sense of human triumph—and so that show was dropped. Our next idea was to parody the human sexual act.

Most of our charges had been rendered impotent, in their post-Judgement bodies, and the others had been condemned to be insatiable. Therefore sex was the perfect subject for a show, dividing our audiences into mutually antagonistic extremes. We would pit some picture of innocence, such as Miplip's girl on a swing, against my febrile approach, and the effect on our guilt-ridden spectators, all of whom had at one time or another allowed their own good natures to be usurped by evil, was immensely gratifying. Even those that did not leap upon their fellows in a paroxysm of lust were nonetheless overwhelmed: they wept, waving their arms, clapping their hands, flopping about, and they silently shouted and shouted. During one such performance...

Oh yes, I remember. I may not remember the moment Miplip and I were first brought together—thrown together, forced together—but this I remember. My overseer had assumed the form of a loving and discreet young mother,

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sitting in a rocker, smiling gently, knitting some garment for a child while at home alone one evening (that I had painted darkly shining outside windows I had painted,) and then I finished my painting and climbed in through one of my illusory windows, menacingly drew near, and took hold. Him? Her? Miplip? What did it matter? A human form. And I went into my puppet act, the same act that according to Miplip tired husbands and tired wives had once enacted repeatedly in their own incomprehensible imaginations, and not just tired husbands and tired wives but lovers too, lovers, imagining other races and mechanical devices and other species when they had no devils handy, because somehow that husband or wife or moment's lover was *not enough* (in all that magnificent world's variety—not enough! Perhaps the idea was only one of Miplip's tales, something to keep me cynical and in control of myself), but even while meditating this way I experienced the impossible tremor that uprooted my stagnant spirit, shook it so it would not be held still, and informed me that there would be no puppetry because this was no act, it was not a suggestion but an order, and Miplip heard the order too because in wholehearted response he at once caused his wifely clothing and rocking chair and uncompleted knitting to disappear, and lay naked beneath me on the air. I closed my eyes; they were all too familiar with his deceit. In my arms he became human.

Unfortunately, genuine sexual congress between myself and Miplip had a ruinous side effect. I did not notice this side effect that first time, because I kept my eyes closed, and my overseer remained blind to what was happening a much longer time, a lack of perception which would have disastrous ramifications. This side effect occurred, always, at the moment of climax. Devils do experience climax—the letting go, the timelessness. At his climax, Miplip would lose control of his morphology and revert momentarily to his natural state. On top of that, he would return to himself as he was at that moment: in transports.

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From his natural ugliness he then always returned, as the orgasm wore off, to his previous shape. Whatever small changes were thus produced he either ignored or failed to notice. It was a humiliating, not to say sickening, process. And as for myself, well, I lacked the heart to tell him. Implausible as it sounds, centuries passed before Miplip learned what our lovemaking did to him.

Look at that: "It was a humiliating process." For *him,* of course. "And as for myself, I lacked the heart." The word for it is *revenge,* one might think. But I cannot agree that revenge was my sole motive in continuing our onstage trysts, even as much as I hated Miplip, even as long as it had been since I held the upper hand. I was shocked, more than anything else. In the rising steam of new emotions brought on by our lovemaking I lost sight of any one particular feeling; only much later on did I recognize sour little Revenge among them. By then I had long since gotten even, long since, so debasing were Miplip's transformations.

Indeed, in all the uncountable times my overseer and I had intercourse, his sudden metamorphosis never caused me to feel any emotion but sadness. How could it have done otherwise? I made sure always to finish quickly, while I was still connected with a human being, because when Miplip reverted to his natural shape my blood shrank with acute, total disappointment. To fall from inexplicable rapture to this repulsive eyesore of a rutting partner from whom I was never free...who can find revenge in that? Oh, there was some satisfaction earlier on, before I finished. I do not deny feeling happy then, in those brief moments. But then, to wait...to know what was about to happen...every single time I wondered if I could possibly survive (though how I got the idea that there is anything besides survival, I cannot imagine), and yet every single time I survived, and Miplip survived, and together we would return to ourselves, transient Lords of partial Torture over some of our unforgiven subjects.

If I was cruel about keeping what I knew from Miplip, it was not so much because of him and me as because of our

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audience. What happened to Miplip during ecstasy was, from the point of view of our spectators, hilarious.

It soon became obvious that our public intercourse was having an opposite effect from the one intended. When, at the close of each performance, Miplip and I broke apart and attacked our charges, pronging and clawing and whipping, they seemed to welcome us. They laughed—or grinned and shook, at least. They toyed with us, feinting and parrying my thrusts, trying to grab hold of my overseer's whip. They picked up flakes of stone or handfuls of excrement and heaved them at us. Worst of all, they clasped each other and rolled around in vicious imitation of our intimacy. Miplip recognized what they were doing, but unlike me he did not understand.

Yet my overseer did not, as I was certain he would, put an end to our shows. His reaction, in fact, was unlike anything I had seen in Miplip before.

Concerning other matters besides our assignations, he became meaner and more superior than ever before. He strutted and floated around our domain in every kind of insulting disguise, railing at me, bragging of trips to earth and to Dis, drumming in his greater knowledge, greater status, greater gifts. At no time did he let slip an opportunity to tear at the skin of my feelings and expose—*there!*—one of my nerves. Perhaps my memory is not entirely accurate, for his infinite unkindnesses do tend to become confused, but I know that it was during this period that once in a while I looked upon our lovemaking as a form of revenge: *well, it serves him right.* More often, however, I got my revenge simply by keeping silent. Whenever I could summon up the strength, I fielded his insults without a word. I would not give him the satisfaction; I made no response. And Miplip, Miplip. This forebearance, when I could hold it, drove you to your wildest excesses. It was degrading. Even I was surprised; my overseer lost control of himself so utterly: falling into apoplectic riots of crack-voiced provocation, involuntarily changing shape, becoming several different creatures at once

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with several different parts of his body, and descending even to physical abuse. Miplip, what did you need, to put yourself through such abasement?

Yet concerning our performances his behavior was just the opposite. Miplip became uncertain, tentative. He made four or five suggestions, more or less along the lines of dropping the show, or nine or ten suggestions, or nineteen or twenty-nine or maybe ninety, but all of them were no more than the merest suggestion. "Only mentioning it," he was, in a voice devoid of belligerence, sounding halfhearted, half himself, half afraid. He sounded a bit like those demons with whom we had discussed the human passerby. I find I cannot fully reconstruct any of these conversations in which Miplip spoke of putting an end to the performances, and this lapse of memory is the natural result of the way in which he always handled the subject. Miplip talked of it as if he wanted me not to notice.

So our trysts continued, if somewhat less regularly than before.

Perhaps my overseer's problem was essentially one of conscience. He wanted to do a good job, but he could no longer be sure what was torture and what was not. Certainly, our duty had never been so open to interpretation, so questionable, or so strangely involving. It was infuriating to admit not knowing where you stood. Myself. . . but I have already explained my feelings.

During one show—during one climax—which Miplip had begun as a ferocious woman with soft fur covering her hands, one of the damned threw a stone at him. At her? At Miplip? What does it matter—the form was no longer human. The stone struck on the wing, hardly hurting Miplip, but shattering his mood once and for all. He knew that the woman with furry hands was not supposed to have his wings. He jerked upright in the air, in his natural ugliness, alert enough to realize what had happened and smart enough, of course he was smart enough, to understand in a moment that

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this could not have been the first time.

I cannot describe, because I lack the ability, the look with which Miplip regarded first the audience, convulsed with laughter, and then myself, still straddling him. There was an awareness of betrayal in the look, I can say that much. And a great deal of pain, as well, a pain too large for me to comprehend, because I have never seen anything that large, consigned as I am to a single blankened Division here, above the City of Dis and below Limbo.

This impossible look was quickly gone. Almost immediately his eyes resumed their customary irony. He may even have winked. What had he thought? Nothing. What had he felt? Nothing, nothing. Then he dropped away from me and began to give his usual vigorous lesson to those who had laughed.

For a few long moments I watched him, making sure.

Not that I was frightened of what Miplip might do to get back at me. What more could he possibly do to me? But I wanted to make sure...he was all right. That look he had given me—well, never mind the look, a look can be misjudged, but I knew Miplip better, and I had more tangible cause for worry than a mere look. I mean that my overseer now knew that I had successfully hid something from him and kept it hidden, and so, if one was inclined to put these things on a competitive basis, the day was mine. Miplip now knew that for once I had won.

Can I be blamed, at all? How had I done wrong?

He lay into our charges with a will. After a while he called up to me, perhaps not with all his usual vituperative gusto, but with most of it. How loudly could he shout, anyway, out of breath as he was? So I dropped down beside him; everywhere devils work in twos. What had happened just now was only an incident, as much his fault as mine, and Miplip was not one to be bothered by incidents.

While I was distracted—while my back was turned—he disappeared. I found his whip, but he was gone.

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With thoroughgoing care, I searched the corridors and enclaves of my Division. I examined the eyes and body of every demon that came through, and those of the Centaurs and hounds as well. I went so far as to embrace them, and whisper in their ears suggestive phrases Miplip would understand. This only served to increase my isolation. I bent my fork on freestanding rocks, hugged riven trees, kissed small dank pools, and caressed shafts of fire. Stumbling and uncaring, I made a blind descent to the monstrous City of Dis and, far exceeding my authority, interrogated the fallen angels guarding its gates. They punished my insubordination. Seeing the bored expressions on the harpies who administered the punishment, and noticing its ritual nature, I understood I was not the first to be disappointed and reprimanded.

I thought: did the others who were punished continue to search? The punishment was hardly slight. Yet the devils who sometimes traveled through my Division were always alone, and though I had never before thought of them as seeking after something, that could well be their situation. Once a demon is chastised—perhaps not the first time, but after a few more times—the aches and festerings must eventually become less painful than the thought of abandoning the quest. Yet the idea of so many devils on so many private crusades raised the most horrifying prospect of all in my mind's eye, that of a vast place devoid of pleasure, in which there are no overseers and subordinates, no giants and mites, no punishers and punished, but only an infinite calendar of torture and impenetrable silence, in which the ones who can fly are no more free than those who can only walk, and the pain inflicted on whoever happened to pass below was thriftily recycled for a second use higher up, and a two-hundred-million-and-second use, always the same pain, never growing smaller but only narrower and more extensive, until Hell had been dirtied from end to oblivion by that same original drop of blood, or tear, or both, which had been squeezed out at the first instant of the creation of pain. In an

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effort to break this nightmare cycle, I tried giving up my search for Miplip. Why torture myself pursuing him who had tortured me?

I again took up my attempt to recapture the sound of a human voice. Having so much room to myself, so much time to myself, I was able to vary volume and experiment with echo effects as I pleased. Visiting devils heard me, and no doubt guessed what I was up to, but I felt incontrovertibly separated from them already. I did not care what they heard or surmised. I only wished, from time to time, seeing one pause while flying overhead, seeing him look down at me inquisitively, I only wished that he would lend me a hand. But no one ever mingled his voice with mine; I went on alone. My duties I gave less and less attention, but after all, considering the doubts I had been suffering, a certain inattention to my duties was the least that could have been expected.

Perhaps it was this laxness, then, or perhaps it was simply the strangeness of a devil trying to imitate human speech, but eventually I began to draw large and quietly attentive audiences from whatever group of damned souls happened to be in the area. Try as I might to chase them off, they always returned to listen some more. My fork caused only the briefest withdrawal, and my renderings of their earth's beauties were now, without Miplip's help, no more than vague glosses out of a confused jumble of memories.

Sometimes, when approximating a human voice seemed like too great a task, I instead tried to recreate the special sound that my runaway overseer's voice had once had, that time he made his odd speech about silliness.

And then . . . though I fought against it with every weapon I had . . . once more I felt my insensible spirit rising, rising, though I shrieked out loud against it, tried to lose myself in orgies of torture, ripped apart those unfortunate charges of mine that got in my way, even dragged myself down to Dis and had myself punished again. It was all to no avail. I had got it into my mind, never to be

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driven out, that *I could find Miplip.* I reiterated as many of his injuries as I could recall, marking them off on the impartial face of a boulder, but though the stone was so covered with markings it crumbled to bits, it made no difference. I knew he had to be here, he had to be among my charges, and I would find him.

With Heaven and Hell the way they are, he could not be anywhere else. My overseer is more clever than I, but not so clever as the devils around Dis, and they have less wits than the ones farther below.

Therefore he had become one of the damned. The ploy was characteristically wise: there are more of them than anything else in Hell. How could I know, while working my way through a crush of preterites, if one of the bodies ahead of me quietly metamorphoses into a rivulet of vomit running between my feet, and then into another body behind me? Moreover, Miplip's taking a place among our charges was characteristically proud, as well, for in human form my old overseer would find himself vulnerable to the fearsome geography—he would suffer the heat, the stink, the pestilential lichens—and therefore remaining untraceable would require a tremendous effort of will: one cry of pain at the wrong time and I would have him. I knew that the enormous discipline involved in keeping silent would appeal to my own, my old, lofty Miplip.

So I began to inspect my charges, one by one. Never had I been so close to them. I touched their faces, gazed deep into their reflecting eyes, stroked them frankly, boldly spoke to them. They will be here forever, but they have not been here forever; that thought sustained me. I resolved that, on the untold day when I exhausted their number, I would start again.

In the course of my searching, I discovered the man who had once, so long ago, passed through this inferno unharmed.

He was among the Wrathful. Who can understand? Perhaps he had neglected to control his powers, and his

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poetry—for even in my present solitude I had heard the news that he was a poet—had not done the job it was given; instead of describing a pilgrim's journey, in the middle of life's road, down through the circles of torment in this world, back again through Purgatory, attaining at last to beatific Grace, his poetry perhaps had merely trumpeted himself and his petty angers. Having set out to demonstrate eternal values, he instead revealed himself. Or perhaps the Powers had planned it this way from the first, that would be like Them. No man may just visit; he must return to stay. Or maybe the poet with the formidable nose was actually Miplip, Miplip, still a demon, still torturing others with visions of alternatives, of there existing something else, something *more*. Miplip—more? More than we have? More than we *see*? But Miplip was gone, after all. It was unreasonable, very strange, that I should worry so much about him when he was gone.

Whoever he was, this man conversed with me.

We exchanged ideas by means of pantomime. Apparently he was very excited about being given the chance to try. He had jostled his way to the front of the line I was examining, and as his hands and arms flew about he grinned, whenever his mouth was not being called upon to aid expression. Each statement was made with a huge energy, a silent, ambidextrous outburst of human feeling that strove always for the most accurate effects, the thing closest to true speech. He succeeded in getting across a great deal, more than I would have thought possible. He said they had gotten accustomed to pain, just as Miplip had suspected. The reminders of earth were very depressing, he said, as we had hoped they would be, but after a while this sorrow, too, had faded, and the damned had come to look forward to our shows, as refreshing variations in the routine.

He then said that their fondest wish at present was to begin, somehow, communicating with us, because they had developed a great fondness, a great sympathy, for their keepers. A devil's existence is predicated on torture, he said.

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Since it is impossible to torture anyone forever, we were now condemned to what was originally intended for them: a life without hope.

After that his thoughts moved beyond the range of mime. But I lingered there before him, enjoying his mute philosophy. Others in the area watched us, or else began again their aimless, milling search for something besides the routine. I had no more regard for them than I had for how time was passing, as I watched this man struggling to make his points; nor did I care how that damned deluder Miplip might be using the time—always his greatest ally—to slip further away. The poet seemed to be saying that the problem of hope (hands clasped over heart, raised to forehead, then opened upwards and raised to roof) and the problem of speech (mouth opening and closing while left hand, palm up, moves from lower lip out towards listener and back), were one and the same, and that neither hope nor speech had very much to do, in the final analysis, with pain (face in a grimace, left hand in a fist and jabbing chest repeatedly, in the vicinity of the heart).

This last sight seemed to penetrate me, actually enter and pass through, like that man or any other who had passed through Hell and been reborn, leaving in the wake of its emotion a vacuum that could no longer be filled by mere looking. I had to touch. Moved, startled beyond even the constant abjurations my conscience had made against physical contact since the disappearance of Miplip, I reached out and took hold of his fist as it once more struck his chest. With his free hand he covered mine. All at once there was speech, real speech, in a voice that had been consumed twice over, once by agony and once by the implacable need of forgiveness:

"Don't let go, please, please, don't let go," Miplip said. "Oh lover, please."

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Joseph Brodsky

Lagoon

I

Down in the lobby three elderly women, bored,
Take up, with their knitting, the Passion of Our Lord
    As the universe and the tiny realm
Of the *pension "Accademia,"* side by side,
With TV blaring, sail into Christmastide,
    A look-out desk-clerk at the helm.

II

And a nameless lodger, a nobody, boards the boat,
A bottle of grappa concealed in his raincoat
    As he gains his shadowy room, bereaved
Of memory, homeland, son, with only the noise
Of distant forests to grieve for his former joys,
    If anyone is grieved.

III

Venetian churchbells, tea cups, mantle clocks,
Chime and confound themselves in this stale box
    Of assorted lives. The brazen, coiled
Octopus-chandelier appears to be licking,
In a triptych mirror, bedsheet and mattress ticking,
    Sodden with tears and passion-soiled.

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IV

Blown by nightwinds, an Adriatic tide
Floods the canals, boats rock from side to side,
    Moored cradles, and the humble bream,
Not ass and oxen, guards the rented bed
Where the windowblind above your sleeping head
    Moves to the sea-star's guiding beam.

V

So this is how we cope, putting out the heat
Of grappa with nightstand water, carving the meat
    Of flounder instead of Christmas roast,
So that Thy earliest back-boned ancestor
Might feed and nourish us, O Savior,
    This winter night on a damp coast.

VI

A Christmas without snow, tinsel or tree,
At the edge of a map-and-land corseted sea;
    Having scuttled and sunk its scallop shell,
Concealing its face while flaunting its backside,
Time rises from the goddess's frothy tide,
    Yet changes nothing but clock-hand and bell.

VII

A drowning city, where suddenly the dry
Light of reason dissolves in the moisture of the eye;
    Its winged lion, that can read and write,
Southern kin of northern Sphinxes* of renown,
Won't drop his book and holler, but calmly drown
    In splinters of mirror, splashing light.

*Sculptured figures placed along the enbankments of the Neva River in Leningrad

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VIII

The gondola knocks against its moorings. Sound
Cancels itself, hearing and words are drowned,
    As is that nation where among
Forests of hands the tyrant of the State
Is voted in, its only candidate,
    And spit goes ice-cold on the tongue.

IX

So let us place the left paw, sheathing its claws,
In the crook of the arm of the other one, because
    This makes a hammer-and-sickle sign
With which to salute our era and bestow
A mute *Up Yours Even Unto The Elbow*
    Upon the nightmares of our time.

X

The raincoated figure is settling into place
Where Sophia, Constance, Prudence, Faith and Grace
    Lack futures, the only tense that is
Is present, where either a goyish or Yiddish kiss
Tastes bitter, like the city, where footsteps fade
    Invisibly along the colonnade,

XI

Trackless and blank as a gondola's passage through
A water surface, smoothing out of view
    The measured wrinkles of its path,
Unmarked as a broad "So long!" like the wide piazza's
        space,
Or as a cramped "I love," like the narrow alleyways,
    Erased and without aftermath.

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XII

Moldings and carvings, palaces and flights
Of stairs. Look up: the lion smiles from heights
    Of a tower wrapped as in a coat
Of wind, unbudged, determined not to yield,
Like a rank weed at the edge of a plowed field,
    And girdled round by Time's deep moat.

XIII

Night in St. Mark's piazza. A face as creased
As a finger from its fettering ring released,
    Biting a nail, is gazing high
Into that *nowhere* of pure thought, where sight
Is baffled by the bandages of night,
    Serene, beyond the naked eye,

XIV

Where, past all boundaries and all predicates,
Black, white or colorless, vague, volatile states,
    Something, some object, comes to mind.
Perhaps a body. In our dim days and few,
The speed of light equals a fleeting view,
    Even when blackout robs us blind.

Translated by Anthony Hecht

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Portfolio

Snowgoose

Marsha Burns

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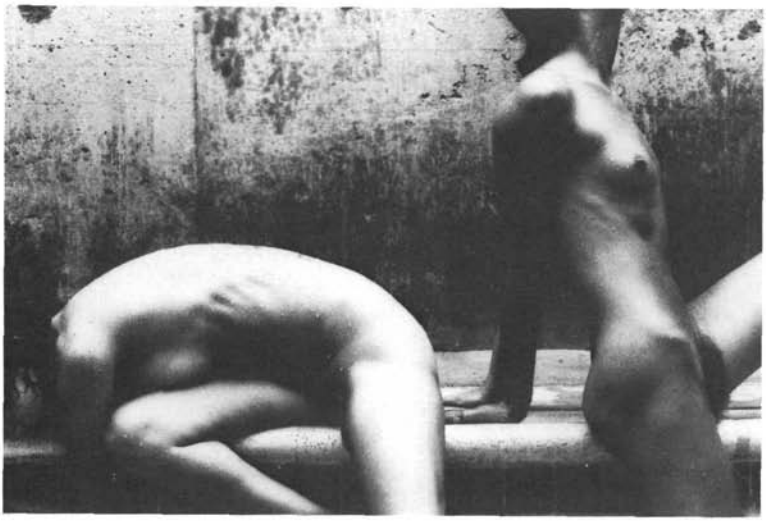

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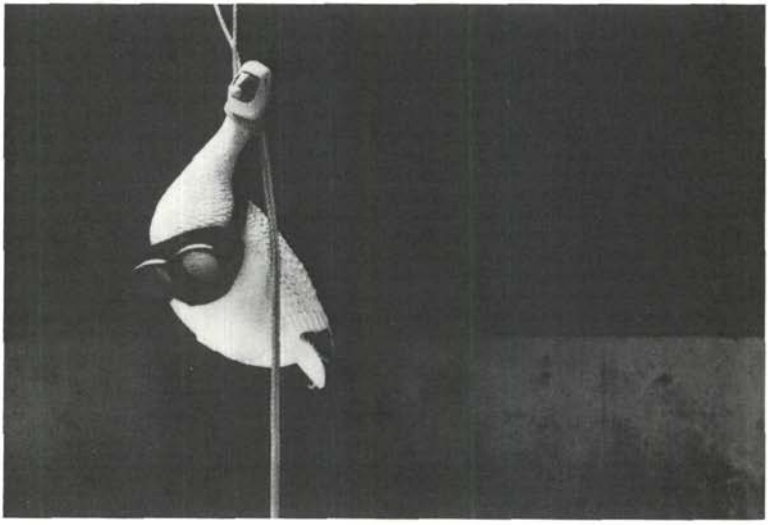

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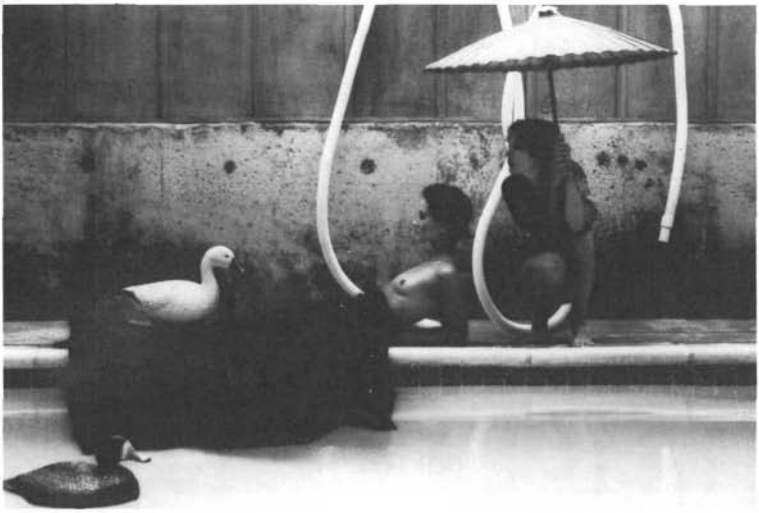

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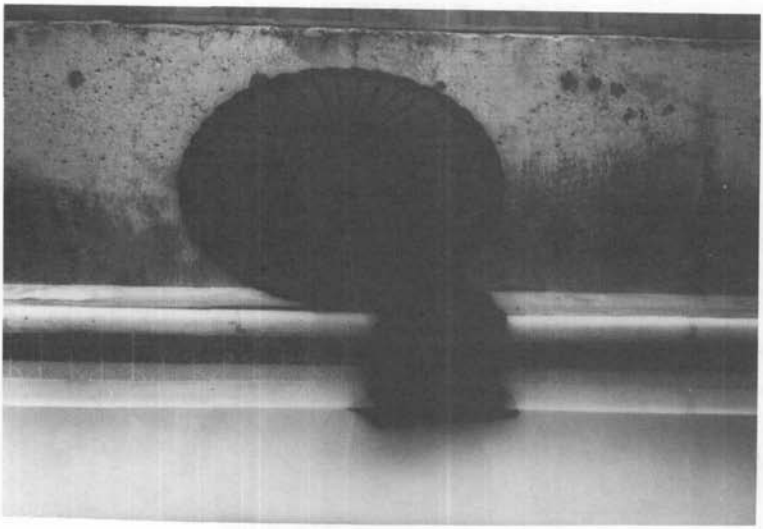

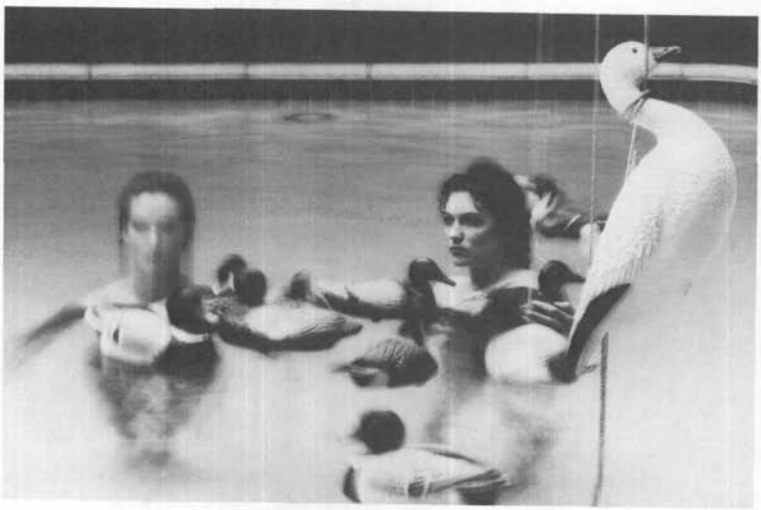

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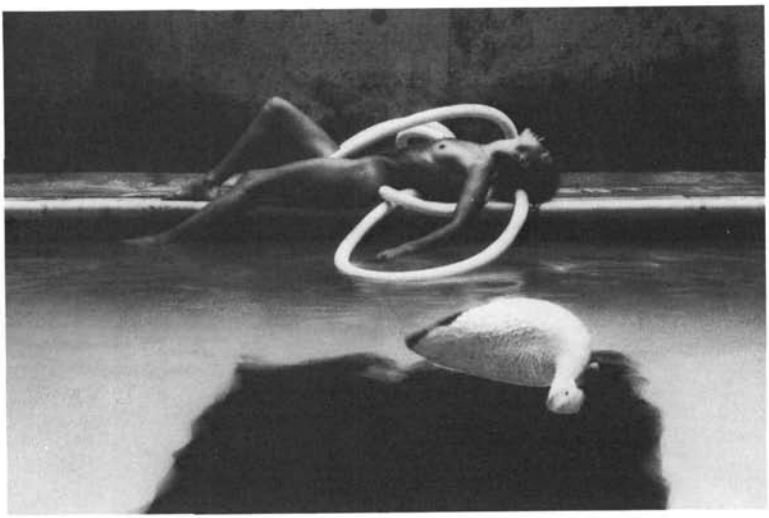

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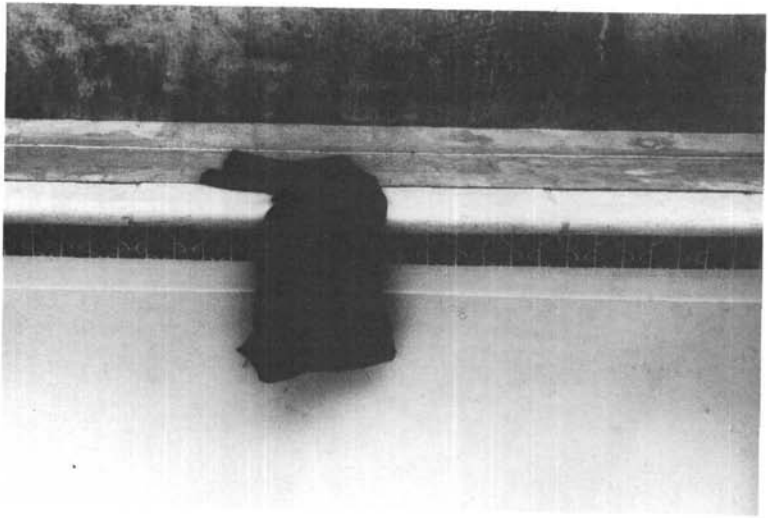

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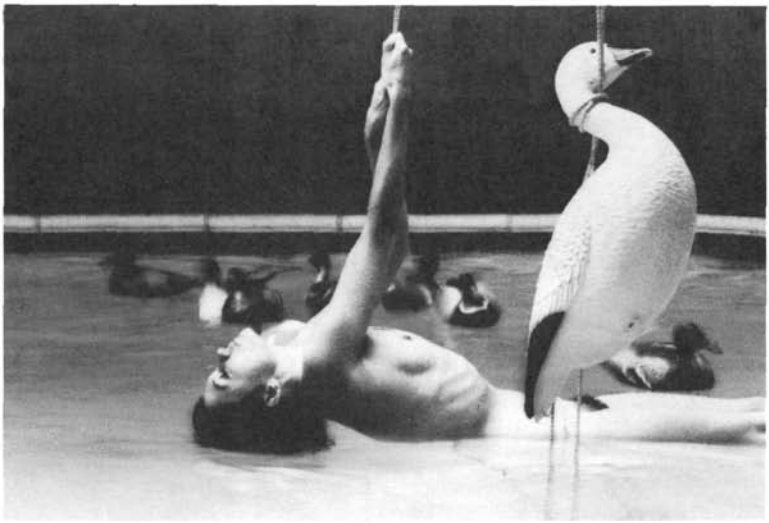

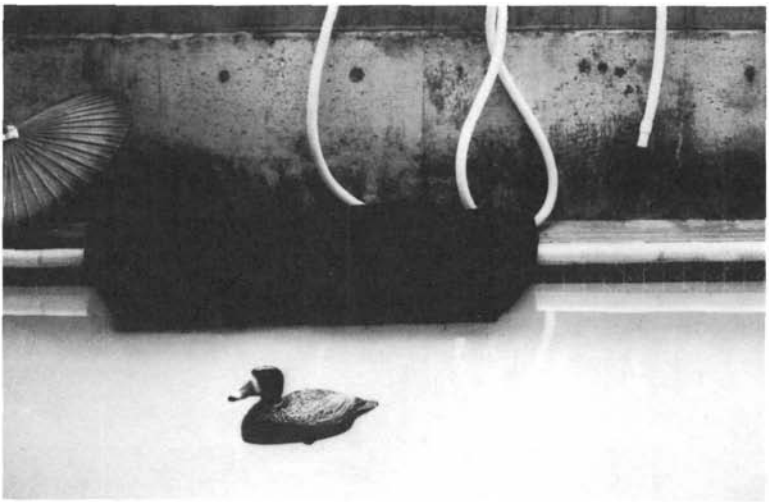

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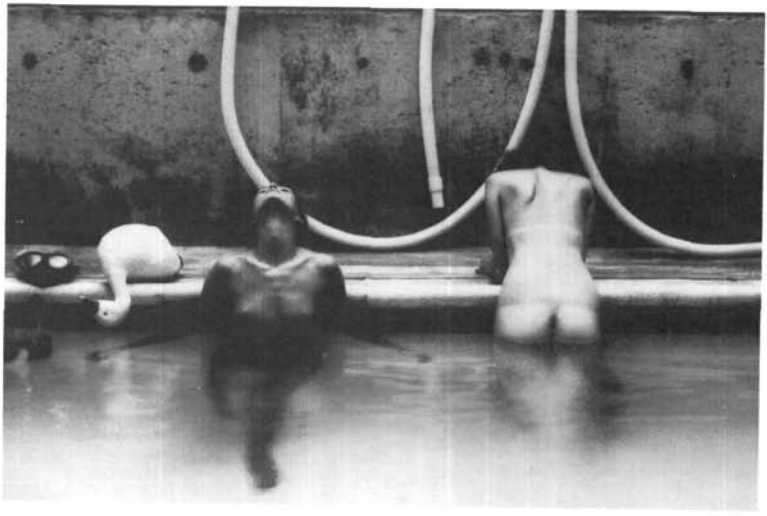

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Frozen Assets

by M*ry G*rd*n

Prudence Crowther

Fang's internment was a momentous affair. Everyone showed, even Dr. Cobbam, whose refusal to replace an arthritic hip socket with stainless had no doubt hastened Fang's end, and demanded of my final vigil the full, grim measure of devotion. I still clutched the Polaroid from the morgue: the embalming staff all in white, professionally long-faced next to the ill-named gladioli; the deceased, lying in state, his fine old neck set off by a taffeta ribbon. The sound of sod hitting the casket startled me: I thought I saw his little canine soul escape, a brown and white lozenge airlifted by his own revolving tail. I would never see him again.

Mr. Mooney of the pet store, purveyor of fine rawhide cigars, intoned the final prayers, dogs to dust, cats to ashes, but I did not hear them. A huge pair of wing-tips floated out from under his short pants-legs like a catamaran split in two. Mrs. Mooney wept soggily by his side, stifling her pecksniffles, despising me for choosing elegy over doggerel:

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FANG

1960-1977

BEAUTY WITHOUT VANITY
COURAGE WITHOUT ARROGANCE

But of course she had never read Byron. Don Juan was what she called her best friend's husband when they were alone. Fang had not lost his life, I consoled myself, he had merely taken his leave from people like Mrs. Mooney, who christened their dogs Bolingbroke only to nickname them "Tinkles" or "Muffin."

Do not imagine that because I was not moved, because I could remain dispassionate and mean-spirited at such a time, that I was unaffected by Fang's death. He had given my life a pattern as predictable as bargello. Though I darned his little sweaters I never damned them, and if I sometimes resented carrying him out to the fire hydrant, it nonetheless divided my days into units so small they were easily conquered.

Cassie and Francine, my oldest friends from parochial school, dropped me off at the house, FOR SALE. I had no use for the yard now—not that Fang himself had had the run of it lately. I promised to call them before nightfall, when I had done with the real-estate agents.

I tried to tidy up, turning to the wall the very icons of my recent life—a small rubber copy of the *Times*, milk bones for the 20-30 lb. hound. Poured from the height of the counter they would land in his dish like cherry bombs. He loved that, even when we both knew he could no longer chew them.

The afternoon dragged on, until at last it appeared the house would be sold to a dog-owning couple, who delicately asked if the tick collar on the hook by the stove were still active. It had been a year since Fang had been able to sustain a parasite; they'd left on their own.

I left the neighborhood for the first time in two years in Cassie's station wagon. I was touched to see her and Francine

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observing a ceasefire on my behalf: theirs was a case of non-elective affinities.

Francine was plump, fair-skinned, and light-minded; Cassie had Baudelaire's *"hanches de l'Antiope,"* the boyish haunches of a young antelope. Francine wore the darkly befuddled look of a guernsy who's misplaced her cud, yet when she batted her lashes, men played her deep. Cassie wore only blue jeans and had been expelled from Father O'Farmassy's class for posing the scholastic riddle we'd concocted in the lavatory: if the wages of sin is death, what was overtime? I adored both of them.

I eyed Cassie's cowboy boots now with an admiration she clearly enjoyed, and asked what they were made of.

"Prosciutto." The three of us laughed until our faces felt like sails, luffing.

Turning the corner we passed the last house in my development. The grass burned salmon on the lawn; late afternoon sun dissolved the patio chairs like a pointillist painting. If from now on my life were broken into little dots, it had at least been done before.

That night we all stayed over at Francine's. I pretended to take a bath, but crouched quietly in the empty tub, trying to hear them. Cassie was saying that I had the wrong idea about selflessness, that animal needs included my own. I stared at my knees, firm and round like two helpings of Floating Island. I began to suspect there was more to me than mere cleverness.

The next day was Monday, the day of my interview with Cassie's husband's employer, City Park Commissioner Paddy O'Hara. Since the new leash-law crackdown, an alarming number of pets had been returned to the pound. The city had been given monies to fund an office of Canine Ombudsman, whose job would be to screen all candidates for pet adoption. An owner on probation would, it was hoped, be less scornful of the law. It smacked of Cassie's benign intervention, and I guessed she was not above playing on her husband's old attraction for me to pull it off successfully.

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"Vivian! You look *wun*-derful!" Chip stopped acupressuring a dimpled clerk long enough to embrace me full in the reception area. The distaff clearly resented the intrusion and skulked back to their desks. I could tell they had never read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* and suddenly I hated them for it.

Chip steered me to a rear office as if my backside were a rudder. I was afraid O'Hara would assume we were intimate. "Vivian—Commissioner O'Hara, the best dogcatcher this side of Abilene. Am I right, Paddy?"

"Cassie tells me this job is made for you." Paddy stuck out his hand and smiled apologetically. As we went over the job description I felt my grasp of the problem exceeded his, and I grew confident and eager. We agreed I would start right away.

Cassie and Francine met me for lunch at the local pizza outlet, Ciao Down. I felt lightheaded from my morning and couldn't wait to tell them all that had happened. My talks with Cassie had mostly been on the phone—long, convoluted spirals of message units like DNA. Those with Francine reminded me of medieval diptychs, full of images that came off better in a dim place, rather than in a second-hand prose account.

"Vivian, this is Thad. He's building some cupboards for me," Cassie explained. Thad: the name was irreducible, like tungsten (W), or chlorine (Cl). Not one tombstone in the Gainesberg Canine Cemetery (and I knew them all) was so chiselled. Man's best friend is the dog; Fang lived on in me; Thad was a man. Would Thad be my husband? You could say what you liked (as Cassie always had) about Catholic education, but scholastic rigor was hard to fault.

"Enchanted, I'm sure," I said, relieved not to have asked for his paw.

"Are you?" His voice was firm and tender and capacious. My heart leaped up and hung there. Francine ordered for me, covering my seizure: baked ziti, battered and crisp as an abused child in a freshly ironed pinafore. Where would it end? Probably I would have to figure out the tip by doubling

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the tax, like everyone else. I felt a simple joy in the prospect of being $3.75 poorer.

Thad offered to drive me to his sister's apartment. She had a teaching fellowship on the West Coast for the fall semester, and if I would be willing to bird-sit Steven, the canary, I could sublet her place.

We walked slowly toward a jeep in the lot. I had no trouble keeping up, and he seemed surprised and pleased. The fall air circled around us buoyantly, darting slyly into our separate nostrils.

We drove along in silence. After ten minutes the car slowed in front of a small brick tenement. Thad swiveled my chin toward him: "I must tell you I've been happier these last few seconds than you can possibly imagine." He left me alone to negotiate with his sister.

The place was mine, and I was free to begin work at once. My clientele fell into three groups: those who wanted to adopt a first pet; those looking to enlarge their pet families; those approaching the end of their probation periods. The last sounded perfunctory, and off I went to the home of one Dorothy ("Dot") Schweizer.

Her mongrel, Snax, was a clear case of the inbreeding of diverse strains, most of which still showed on his sad little face. His pitiful carriage reeked of neglect—of dank, withheld caresses and soft, unsaid "here boys, here boys." As his mistress slipped into the kitchen to make tea, the dog walked on legs of concrete to where my coat lay on the windowseat. He sniffed my purse and looked back: had I brought the cyanide capsule?

Dot came back with tea things on a découpage tray, which she cleared somewhat self-consciously. I duly examined a lacquered photograph of what proved to be a rather familiar staff of *toques blanches,* standing behind a small white airdale.

"Wellington and I were together fourteen years," she said quietly.

"I'm sorry." And I was, especially to have unleashed a eulogy of the deceased that made Anselm's definition of God

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sound dirty and unfair. During this recital Snax collapsed from a couchant to a prostrate position in front of the artificial fireplace, looking like a hearth rug without sizing.

I wanted to tell Dot to stop living in her romantic past. Snax could never fill the Duke's boots, and her anxieties would no doubt be self-fulfilling. Perhaps she should try another species altogether: a Northern Spring Peeper, a pair of cobra-tail guppies—anything not driven by the need to please.

I said only: "It's possible Snax will be happy here, but it seems to me you both still have some adjusting to do. What if I come back in a month?"

If eyes were newspapers, Mrs. Schweizer had stung Snax with a folded one. I left abruptly and ran to a phone booth, waiting for Thad's voice like a ticketless child at a carousel.

"Vivian—over here! Geez, what's wrong? Something *is* wrong." Thad adjusted my seatbelt patiently, then the shoulder strap and head brace. Outside the window the disfiguring orthodontia of angry teenagers loomed accusingly. I closed my eyes and tried to separate pathetic fallacy from self-pity, gripping the armrest as a defense against everything that is menacing and hyperbolic.

Thad parked outside a deli and patted my armature: "You wait right here." He returned with his arms full, dumping tiny pink bundles in my lap as he leaned to kiss me. With reflexes honed on long years of Fang's nuzzling, I jerked to the right. The lips landed on my carcoat, and I felt their warmth through my sleeve.

We hunted until we found an untonsured grassy slope in the park and got out. In a hush I watched Thad lay out our meal: Gruyère and roast beef; mustard; corn chips; rye bread with seeds you bit into like toy grenade pins. He passed me a dish of fresh similes, the hair on his wrists soft and pale, like Brie without running off.

I began to talk of my strange new life, hesitant to reveal how narrowly my world had been circumscribed by Fang's. Not only did Thad not seem to care—to my astonishment he

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was soon talking freely of an African softshell that had lived in his shop nearly a year. His voice quavered as he described having to constantly free her snout of sawdust. In the end he had taken her back.

I fell silent, respecting his pain. He took my hand, turning it over and over. My bones were deliquescent and outgoing, my flesh sovereign as a coin. I bucked, I dove: a rodeo, an albacore. Soon we were tangential. My brain, serene as shallots, told me I was late for my afternoon appointment.

Brian Boyle was seeking to swell his one-cat family by a dog's worth, and I was there to see that his reasons for petting, as Chip coined it, were honorable.

"Loneliness, I suppose. Surely you've *known* loneliness, Miss Stacis?"

In fact Brian could not have looked more content in his vast loft, unpartitioned except for a large canvas supported by two easels. He directed me into a loveseat made of clear plastic cushions full of beans. The loneliness of course was a ruse, but I warmed to it. If one was going to dissemble, being a bad actor undermined the effort. I loved his attempt, his failure.

"Here's Fog now, coming in on little pussyfeet—see how aloof she is? Whereas dogs cling a little, don't they? And I'm beginning to think I need that."

"Hello baseball head," I said imaginatively. The cat looked at me as if she were the false Anastasia caught with her Romanoffs.

Brian laughed and clapped his hands, cymbals of flesh. He pulled up a cable spool and sat next to me. "If you really must know," he said, gesturing to his canvas and lowering his voice, "I've painted her damn fe-lines too many times. I was thinking—perhaps a large, bulky dog: more architecture, less psyche. . . . I suppose my motives are all wrong."

"I like what you're doing, Brian. I like it very much. I will try to help you. I will try very hard."

We shook hands at the bottom of the stairs as if it were all taken care of. Clearly Brian would offer any adoptee some-

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thing beyond what I myself had given Fang. "Semi-invalid, needs companion. . . ." As a perfect liar, I could expedite a perfectly good act. What was absolute, and where absolution?

Unable to get a handle on yet another moral quagmire in less than two days, I dialed Thad. I heard myself invite him to dinner the following night, and heard him say yes sure he would yes.

I got down my eighty-second edition of *The Joy of Cooking* and was soon deep in the mysteries of coxcomb blanching. I had totally forgotten that a woodchuck may be parboiled as for ground sloth and dressed as a rabbit, as long as the kernels under the forearm were removed. I studied the long way to cook a peccary, the shortcuts for an elk saddle with Cumberland gaps. At last I came to the snipe or woodcock, "with its long beak, meager body and prominent eyes" that brought Thad before me in all his modest vacancy.

The following day was spent organizing my first manila folders—an ineffectual distraction for which I was nervously grateful. At 4:30 I left work, then came home before jumping into the shower. I powdered myself dry and sprayed on the cologne Francine had given me, Canon by Pachabel. I preheated the oven and smiled at my reflection in the tea kettle, my teeth full and curved.

Thad came bearing a wine he called Suave, and opened it quickly and well. Happy and nervous, we quaffed mouthfuls like Olympic butterfly champions gasping for air. At last I sprang the snipe from the stove and lay it on a platter. Steve swung down onto his jingle bell with a jumpy urgency to his jangling that jarred with the moment.

"Where do you suppose is the knee joint on a creature like this?" Thad asked like the old rhetors. "Maybe you should cover the cage while I carve."

He cut the thigh away from the body until the ball-and-socket of the hip was exposed, and twisted the knife to disengage the tendons. I stared at the snipe for doneness. It was nearly raw.

"Shall we leave this in a little longer?" said Thad.

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I swung my eyes hard onto his face: he was dead sober. I had never noticed how unattractive his haircut was, so like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead. It explained his jauntiness, his awful detachment.

I looked at the bloody carcass and then at Steve, his body a small yellow yield sign.

"What is it, Vivian? Are you all right?"

"We can't go on like this, Thad."

"Why? Look, I'll just put it back in the—"

"WILL YOU *STOP!?* You can't *taste* the irony? Of course not! A man who returns his own softsh—"

"Cheryl meant nothing to me, and nothing you can say will change that." He put his fork down on the table. The toes of my brain scrabbled to find a firm bottom: whither Cheryl had gone, there should I went. Somewhere in a crowded, dusty tank, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans...

Thad put his fork down again. That made twice, I thought coolly, as if it were someone else's cutlery.

"Don't kid yourself, Vivian. That's not goodness, it's false charity. Don't forget these are *animals.*"

I stared at the muscles on Thad's neck. The sound of his voice had always thrilled me—the sternness, the syntax. Yet now, as if for the first time, I saw how flat his pectorals were. It explained his humorlessness, his petulance.

"But don't you *see,* Thad?" I said, relentless as typhus. "If we can love the very things that repel us most, we can snap the great chain of being that shackles us so. If you could love Cheryl, you could love anything."

He assumed a look of disgust and pushed his plate away. I could see I was losing him. He buckled his shoes and left.

I went back to the table and picked at the snipe. I polished off the biscuits and half a quart of orange juice, the unskimmed mozarella from the refrigerator, the last of the marble halvah. My body was already beginning to sag, but it would not matter now. I got out my old hair camisoles and cut off my bangs with a razor.

The next morning I went to the office as usual and finished

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up my most recent evaluations. Then I went through the Yellow Pages, copying out every pet shop where Thad could conceivably have deposited Cheryl.

Pettin' Place, Lizard Frères. . . I saw eels like cucumbers, heard mynahs spar ("Who's on first?"), saw turtles stacked like dormitory bunkbeds in an unendowed school. But I did not find Cheryl.

At Ruth's Boas I spotted a small lizard I was sure was dead, and directed the manager to its cage. "Won't eat," he said. "Boy traded it in last week. Don't give her much time." I brought the false-Cheryl home in a paper carton made for a quarter-pound of lo-mein, she was that thin. For $24 I bought a glass case, two pounds of Terra Firmula, a month of beetle patties.

That night I wrapped my alarm clock in a towel and assembled the new lodgings at the head of my bed; I moved Steve's cage over. By now he too seemed melancholy, unable to perch straight. He leaned unnaturally against his bars and gave off a smell of forced incarceration. The decay of feather and scale seeped into the air, hung out where the patching spackle had cracked.

My weekly routine soon crystallized as I set myself the task of becoming expert on my new charges. I read widely, moving from general primary sources to the most arcane monographs—Bewick on herpetology, Dodge on the Ozark Hellbender. I decided Cheryl was basically too cold, and bought a light box to put under her case. Soon she was eating regularly, even gaining a little weight.

Her inability to express gratitude soothed me. I knew I was always necessary, always sufficient. If we did not love each other as neighbors the way we loved ourselves, neither did we bear false witness. We grew tolerant: I did not fault Steve for his torpor or Cheryl for her scaliness. They in turn did not seem to care that I had got incredibly heavy on my sedentary life and starchy diet.

Once or twice Cassie called, trying to be helpful, asking how many credits away I was from a Spinster of Arts. In the

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background I heard her slap her boyish thigh. I hung up and went back to my studies.

I was working on a hunch that Steve's malaise stemmed from inner-ear trouble, and to that end was now poring over a diagram of a concave drum connected to the hammer, the anvil, and stirrup. I closed my eyes and imagined how many of Steve's hammers it would take to equal one of Thad's. . . .

I was in a summer cottage in the Hartz Mountains. Steve sat in his cage near the open window watching the sunset; a little smile played about his beak. Bugs began to come in, drawn by the lamp next to my chair. Cheryl became animated, first biting at the glass, then at the big, dusty moths deflected into her cage; she had trouble swallowing. I switched off the light. Steve continued to glow. I moved him closer and kept reading.

Lit from below by her light box, Cheryl's silhouette now appeared grotesquely magnified on the ceiling. A small plane came into view and flew toward the alligator-like shape. The head snapped; the wings snapped. In seconds the alligator had caught fire, showering me with flaming debris.

I woke up screaming and beating my covers. I looked over at Cheryl's cage. She seemed smaller than ever, shrunk from sec to brut. Steve had tipped over, his lower mandible lying agape on the front page of the *News.*

I got up and stared at the two cages, the little carrion groaning for burial. They revolted me. Yet whose offense was greater? In my reptilian ministry I had cloaked myself in the wool of the salamander, a kind of asbestos shroud to prevent the singeing of the spirit.

"A female is so affected by the crooning of a particular male that she will not pair with any other as long as that songster is within earshot." Now I understood: *Thad was that singer,* not Steve. I dialed Cassie's number, feeling humid and slim and facile.

"Vivian! Where *are* you?. . . Wait for me—I'll be right over." We both wept quickly.

"And Cassie. . ."

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"What is it, toots?"

"Could you bring two shoe boxes?"

I got together some of my things and slipped Steve and Cheryl into a pair of socks. I knotted the ends and buttoned my coat as far as it would go.

Suddenly there were Cassie and Francine, popping miraculously out of the front seat. The two of them looked at my waistline and laughed, skeletons of meaning forming over my head.

"I know. I've got to pull myself together before I see anyone," I added to that already boneful existence.

We got in and Cassie started the car. "Who did your hair? Brzezinski?" They laughed again, my face shattering on the floor. I smiled. It would take a great deal of vacuuming.

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Four Poems by Gregory Orr

Murderer's Songs

Where each drop of blood
struck: lips in the dirt.
And on my chest as I
slept, a mouth appeared:
a nightflower.
Low moans came from it.
I stitched it shut.

My fingers stuck to what
they touched. I escaped
because my face, radiant
axe-blade, kissed the wrist.

Because I lug the invisible
dead, I'm heavy and my steps
bruise the earth.
Ashes when I'm gone; grind
the boneshards to dust.
I don't want any evidence
against me when I'm dead;
I'll be what your boot stubs up:
I'll be the bandage,
I'll be the road.

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The Guns

1
Stalking sparrows with a b-b gun;
the bird falls, but
not killed by the copper bead,
only wounded and fluttering;
tears in eyes, I shoot it
again and again, vow
never to hunt anymore.

2
Then shooting a .410 at clay pigeons
behind the garage, never hitting one;
retrieving the frail saucers
where they fall in the tall grass.

3
Moving step by step toward that day
when I sit alone on a stump
in cold October woods, shotgun
across my lap, waiting for squirrels
that move toward me over the dry leaves
like frightened, fur-cloaked boyars
approaching a wrathful czar.

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A Last Address To My Ghosts

You accompanied me so far
and with such ambiguous
fidelity: my guides, my ghosts.
I've seen the candles you carried
going out, one by one,
in the darkness of deep woods.

And the path? The destination?
There never was one,
I learned that from you.
There was only the light
edging the leaves,
and now that's gone.

Branches above my head
extend their darker blessing.

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Indian Summer

At dawn, from the bedroom window: the elm tree's shadow
white with frost. Brief, strange sight; when I returned
with coffee for my wife, the lawn was green again.

The juniper along the fenceline blue with fruit.
The peartree nude, its brown and gold windfall
rotting around it. The woodpile's built.

Sparrows and juncoes squabble in the holly bush.
I know the ground's cold, but my body wants to lie
down among yellow poplar leaves the sun has warmed.

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Diana Ó Hehir

Sleeping Pill

And then the drug takes hold
And goes down into your arms and your fingers,
Wipes the pain along in front of it, washes
Cells clear. The white moons come back in your fingernails,
The bed unfreezes and cradles you; it becomes
That nest you remember from childhood, coaxed from a
mat of leaves,
Wedged up close to the oak tree.
You lie there with your friend with the pale green eyes,
the one who was shot in Vallejo.

He smells of dust and soap, there are shadows of leaf on his
face; he props
Himself up on one freckled elbow;
The hot California day wraps you in its dry tart smell.

And now the drug drowns the base of your spine, it floats
A pale warm ocean around the base of the tree, drowns
The lover in his khaki pants; pulls you
Empty as a new boat,
Home.

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Two Poems By William Stafford

Ruby Was Her Name

My mother, who opened my eyes, who
brought me into the terrible world,
was guilty. Her look apologized:
she knew what anyone said was true about us
but therefore unfair. How could they blame us
for doing the things we were set to do?

Never heroic, never a model
for us, or for anyone, she cowered
and looked from the corner of her eye—
"Et tu?" And it always meant we were
with her, alas. No one else
could find the center of the world.

She found the truth like a victim; it hit
her again and again, and she always cried out.
At the end she turned to me, helplessly
honest still: "Oh, Bill, I'm afraid,"
and the whole of her life went back to her heart,
from me in a look for the look she gave.

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One Of My Letters

My letter to you fell into a river
so deep, so fast . . . , and the clear-eyed pages
tumbled onward. I will never
be able to tell you what was on those pages.

My letter to you had strange marks on it
that looked like tracks. You could follow my reason
crowding forward, but how could I send it
when you hadn't asked a letter from me?

My letter to you—it never got written,
as you probably guessed. I wanted to write. It
suddenly seemed nothing. Listen—a rainbow is
a chime, but withheld. Like my letter to you.

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Ira Sadoff

February: Pemaquid Point

The lighthouse as an image
of loneliness has its limits.

For as we stand on the shore
of this ocean, crusted snow

on the hills and the grass dispersed
beneath it, that tower

seems a place where people gather
some vision of themselves: the marriage

of rock to water, of wave to snail
washed up on shore. We're small,

and waving to the lobster boat—
which could be miles away or close

enough to raise our voices to—makes
us wish our journeys took us further,

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past witness, to a scene, perhaps,
where we belonged. A man in blue

pulls up his net, tiny fish
swim free from it. And the man

pulling anchor, whose strength
pulls him further from the shore,

pays tribute to our rootlessness.
As he shouts to start the engine up,

to take his course, he leaves us
in the distance, the repeated ritual

of his wake. And like the water
stirred against the lighthouse wall,

breaking up, wave after wave, we
forget ourselves. Learn our place.

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Three Poems by Dave Smith

Waking Under Spruce With My Love

Up the hill the motorcycle climbs, its sound
near now, entering the dream
and the girl's hair flares

because it is morning, because I have been sleeping
long enough to become one of the muscles
flexing beside the world's gristle.

I can feel the sheet luff on my thighs, the emptiness
cool and pleasant inside my body, and time
stops counting the spruce limbs.

I think this must be the silence they all loved so much
except I can hear a dog barking, a big dog
far away, then his nails gouging dirt

and I feel myself twist for the articulation to be free
the little engine pumps hard, she hangs
on my shoulders, and we are not

going down in grinding of gravel, not this time, we are
filling silence with the two-stroke slide
of the morning and time rattles

like joy in the spruce, in the car-door slammed, the jay
spitting out the black, stale hours
the sun flying over each bump

in the road, touching the essence of each thing until
the world ticks with unbearable delight,
slows, turns, and comes hard again.

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Going Out At Dawn In the Country Of Our Kin

There would be no more than this,
the quiet, grim grace of the spruce
and the far snow-wash trickling down
almost to nothing, the eyebrows

of each fox bristling with green light
where, beyond knowing, they heard
through our country's roots, some
coming, so wait in a dark of vines.

Across the burned stalks of weed,
through the spokeless, canting wheel,
under praise of a hawk's fanned wing,
there would be no more than this.

The mountain beyond the barn, hazy,
at dusk, as coffee or a woman's hair,
glints, now, in its cold heights,
deaf, distant, as the talk begins,

as all the words we have been saying
rise like a neighbor's wood smoke,
and the dark length of a trout lies
in a near pool gone magical with each

slight but perfect move of his need.
In this country our hands take up
sticks, our feet feel the green press
more deeply, we wander apart, one

by one to sit on rocks, to wait, our
faces gone into our hands. We tap this
ground for whatever answers may be,
saying there would be no more than this.

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Sax Man

Everything had sweat on it, a glistening like spittle,
the kind of slide dreams make, but a real world
where I went, quiet as a bat, only to sing
inside myself, to pass time, to be no more
than a slight thing in the night's wind.

But no wind and I, under the constant chaos of that dark,
hung on the ledge of my love like a dragonfly.
Have hung that way with my dark, shattered eye

full of the horrible hour scaling inside like a baby's
first trip up and down the notes of his knowing.
It chiselled and kicked inside, the image
of her absence, and still I stood
on the flat slick of that time and blew in my hands
when it was not cold, and wanted no dark anywhere

but saw the first gusting firelick. Saw what was not there
and had no name for it but love, and for that leaped
and made in the dark what I wanted to be real, made
the burning that lay in the place of sight

on the lake's face. Did this with mouth dry as a callus
to draw out the song from the wimpling house
of my flesh, saw how it ran screaming

in a nakedness fuming which no one could touch but at
pain.
Touched that, became a man whistling for menus,
stepped into the line of blind foreheads
where now I lie, note after note,
in the ditches of skin, building back what was
beautiful and malign as the slant of her whispering.

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David Bottoms

The Tent Astronomer

As a barrier against mosquitoes,
I pull an old sheet from the closet
and cross the yard,
walk into the field bordering the orange grove
where the sleeping bag lies behind the low tripod,
the hammer and stakes wait in the damp grass.

At each corner
one stake goes into the sandy ground,
then the sheet stretched over the four points,
pulled down and anchored with stones.
The darkness underneath is private.

I lie still for a while
and listen to cicadas crying by the canal,
the crickets and the barking toads,
stink bugs breaking against the walls like small clods,
then with my knife
cut a hole for the barrel,
let lens and mirror lift me up toward light.

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Jim Daniels

Going Up and Down

You talk about the Soo Locks
and how you love to watch the water
go up and down, and the boats,
and I laugh,
"The water goes up and down, big deal,"
and grab the lunch you made me
and run out the door
and drive to the job
to stack steel
and I watch the press go up and down
and the more it goes up and down
the more steel I have to stack.
I understand this up and down of the factory—
it is simple and American—machines and steel—
and I eat the lunch you made me
and close my eyes
and try to picture
the water going up and down.

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Alice Mattison

Breastfeeding

It is like watching Yehudi Menuhin on television.
You see a round face,
mute, busy,
with the look in the eyes
people have when they're paying
close attention, but not
visual attention.
Next to the face, tipped up from the chin
and near enough to the mouth to make your
view seem intimate, what with the musician's
folded handkerchief (almost as if for dribble)
is something with a curved edge, about as big as
the face, soft in one instance, hard in the other; your
breast, or
the violin. It is a crowded picture because
also, in the closeup, is the conductor's elbow, or
your own, which often gets in the way
(especially if you're lying down to nurse) and which looked,
on television, as though it might
bump into the violin, although, of course,
it must actually have been well in front.
Your arm is in back of your breast.
You don't feel the milk coming out,
nor see it;
what you see is someone else
drinking—thwarted music: played
elsewhere. When the milk,
however, starts to flow freely,
after the baby's been sucking for twenty seconds,
you feel, for a moment, as though your breasts
have been inflated, and you get that
sweet tension in your throat—as if there's something good
that you can't remember.

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Jonathan Sisson

Movable Type

It is not consumption of meat,
the great food-chain waste, that makes one ugly.
Watching apes pelt enemies with dung
may remove the bloom from eating fruit.

Nor is it hair, nor poverty—
though watching an urchin so ill with worms
that they fall from her mouth when she speaks
may remove the bloom from poetry.

"The reason I want my tubes tied,"
the patient tells her gynecologist,
"is no one goes out on a date now
to hear a symphony. They just fuck."

The gynecologist daydreams
about his emergency physical
performed on a Miss America
with the vapors, on her goodwill tour.

His kindergarten teacher blooms
like a crocus from the linoleum,
and her scent unlocks the labyrinth,
but the children roil up like magma.

He becomes a flower at last,
full of his medical experience.
The thunderous nightmare lights on him
to taste his offering through its legs.

It takes. His everything is drained
into a network of alien need,
and rises by paired baroque organs,
of language, invented for lying.

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Philip Levine

She's Not Gone

Someone enters your life
on a day you no longer
remember. The years pass,
and she becomes the mother
you never had, the older
sister smoking before breakfast,
the first friend. She lies back
on the worn sofa in the heat
of summer and shares a season
of baseball. When you are
twelve she explains the world,
how the people were sold
down the river, how someone
will always work and waste
away to these essential bones,
muscles, and tendons. She explains
your brother, who at sixteen
needs two clean shirts a day
and will grow to command, she
explains you, who will never,
and she blesses you with a hand
mussing your hair. One day
she is gone, over forty and she

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has fallen in love again,
and love has taken her off
to a man with one leg
and no prospects. A postcard
from California and then
a silence that lasts.
The ironing board waits
in the corner, the worn black
shoes are kicked back into
the closet, her yellowing slip
sags on the back of her chair
until your mother, cursing,
tears it into rags and garbage.
You will look and find her
in the long jaws of other
women, in the hard eyes
that can gleam without hope,
you will find her again
and again because with
two open hands, with a voice
that said anything, with
a new smile for each
new loss, she showed you
a world she could die for.

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Two Poems by Ai

Conversation

For Robert Lowell

We smile at each other
and I lean back against the wicker couch.
How does it feel to be dead? I say.
You touch my knees with your blue fingers.
And when you open your mouth,
a ball of yellow light falls to the floor
and burns a hole through it.
Don't tell me, I say. I don't want to hear.
Did you ever, you start,
wear a certain kind of silk dress
and just by accident,
so inconsequential you barely notice it,
your fingers graze that dress
and you hear the sound of a knife cutting paper,
you see it too
and you realize how that image
is simply the extension of another image,
that your own life is a chain
of words
that one day will snap.
Words, you say, young girls in a circle, holding hands
and beginning to rise heavenward
like white, helium balloons
in their confirmation dresses,
the wreaths of flowers on their heads spinning
and above all that,
that's where I'm floating, Florence,
and that's what it's like
only ten times clearer,
ten times more horrible.
Could anyone alive survive it?

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Yellow Crane Pavilion

Based on a poem by the Tang poet Ts'ui Hao

A man once rode away on a yellow crane,
leaving only this empty pavilion.
Once gone, the yellow crane never returns;
white clouds pass a thousand empty interminable years.

Lucent sky, river and Han-yang trees,
thick perfumed grass of Ying-wu Isle,
sunset, which way is home?
Mist and waves on the river. I'm sad.

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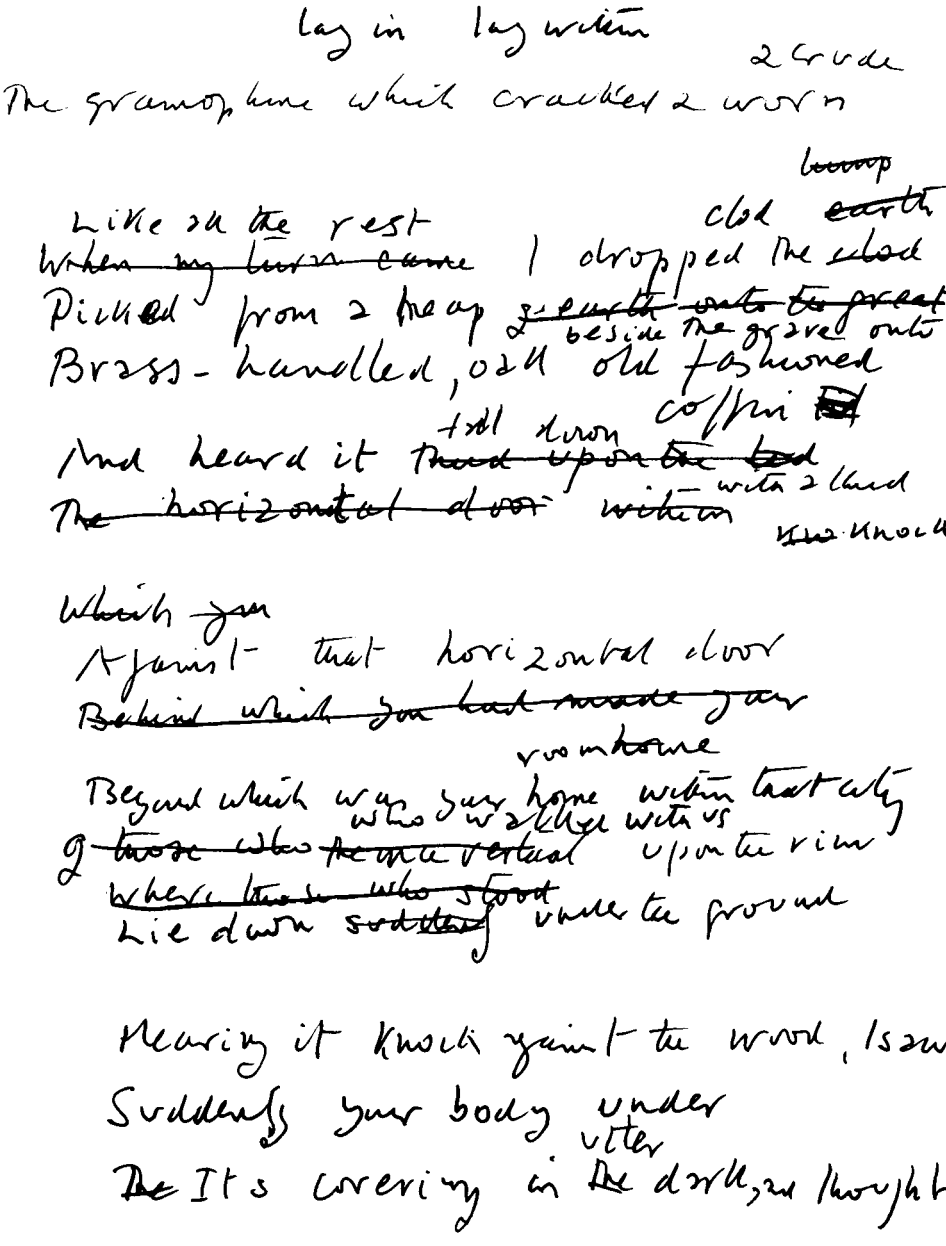

A Stephen Spender manuscript page.

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Self-portrait

Stephen Spender

The Art of Poetry XXV

Stephen Spender is an authentic man of letters in the modern world. He is best known for his poetry, available in Collected Poems, 1928–1953, Selected Poems, *and* The Generous Days, *but has also written a novel,* The Backward Son, *and several volumes of criticism, among them* The Destructive Element, The Struggle of the Modern, Love-Hate Relations: English and American Sensibilities, *and* T.S. Eliot. *His autobiography,* World within World, *is among the finest examples of the genre, a masterpiece of frankness and decorum. More recently published is a volume of memoirs,* The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People, 1933–1970.

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The strength of Mr. Spender's literary reputation, which is international in scope, has made him something of a nomad as scholar and poet. His homes are in St. John's Wood, London, and Maussane-Les-Alpieles, France, where he spends his summers; but he is often on the road, giving readings and lectures and serving as writer-in-residence at various American universities. This interview took place in May, 1978, at the end of Mr. Spender's stint as visiting professor of English at the University of Houston.

Mr. Spender's domicile in Houston was a penthouse apartment atop a high-rise dormitory on the university campus. The walls of the apartment are glass and afforded the poet a 270° view of America's self-proclaimed twenty-first-century city. His fellow residents in the dorm were mostly athletes, a fact which especially delighted Mr. Spender at breakfast, for with them he was served steaks, sausage, ham, eggs, biscuits, and grits.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Spender was busy with several projects; besides preparing for his imminent departure and saying goodbye to his many friends, he was completing the text for a forthcoming book, Henry Moore: Sculptures and Landscape. *He had also been invited by the university to deliver its commencement address, an event that took place on the afternoon of May 13, just hours after our last taping session. "I've never even been to a commencement before. What does one say ?," he had asked. "I suppose I will tell them to read books all their lives and to make a lot of money and give it to the university."*

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to begin by asking about some people you may have known. Were you at all close to William Butler Yeats?

SPENDER

I met Yeats, I think probably in 1935 or 1936, at Lady Ottoline Morrell's. Ottoline asked me to tea alone with

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Yeats. He was very blind and—I don't know whether he was deaf, but he was very sort of remote, he seemed tremendously old. He was only about the age I am now, but he seemed tremendously old and remote. He looked at me and then he said, "Young man, what do you think of the Sayers?" I hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about—I thought perhaps he meant Dorothy Sayers' crime stories or something—I became flustered. What he meant was a group of young ladies who chanted poems in chorus. Ottoline got very alarmed and rushed out of the room and telephoned to Virginia Woolf, who was just around the corner, and asked her to come save the situation. Virginia arrived in about ten minutes time, tremendously amused, and Yeats was very pleased to meet her because he'd just been reading *The Waves.* He also read quite a lot of science—I think he read Eddington and Rutherford and all those kinds of things—and so he told her that *The Waves* was a marvelous novel, that it was entirely up to date in scientific theory because light moved in waves, and time, and so on. Of course Virginia, who hadn't thought of all this, was terribly pleased and flattered. And then I remember he started telling her a story in which he said, "And as I went down the stairs there was a marble statue of a baby and it started talking in Greek to me"—that sort of thing. Virginia adored it all of course.

Ottoline had what she called her Thursday parties, at which you met a lot of writers. Yeats was often there. He loosened up a great deal if he could tell malicious stories, and so he talked about George Moore. Yeats particularly disliked George Moore because of what he wrote in his book *Ave, Salve, Vale,* which is in three volumes, and which describes Yeats in a rather absurd way. Moore thought Yeats looked very much like a black crow or a rook as he walked by the lake on Lady Gregory's estate at Coole. He also told how Yeats would spend the whole morning writing five lines of poetry and then he'd be sent up strawberries and cream by Lady Gregory, and so Yeats would have to get his own back on George Moore. Another thing which amused Yeats very

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much for some reason was Robert Graves and the whole saga of his life with Laura Riding. He told how Laura Riding threw herself out of a window without breaking her spine, or breaking it but being cured very rapidly. All that pleased Yeats tremendously.

I remember his telling the story of his trip to Rapallo to show the manuscript of *The Tower* to Ezra Pound. He stayed at the hotel and then went around and left the manuscript in a packet for Pound, accompanied by a letter saying I am an old man, this may be the last poetry I'll ever write, it is very different from my other work—all that kind of thing—and what do you think of it? Next day he received a post card from Ezra Pound with on it the one word "putrid." Yeats was rather amused by that. Apparently Pound had a tremendous collection of cats, and Yeats used to say that Pound couldn't possibly be a nasty man because he fed all the cats of Rapallo. I once asked him how he came to be a modern poet, and he told me that it took him thirty years to modernize his style. He said he didn't really like the modern poetry of Eliot and Pound. He thought it was static, that it didn't have any movement, and for him poetry had always to have the romantic movement. He said, "For me poetry always means 'For we'll go no more a-roving / By the light o' the moon.' " So the problem was how to keep the movement of the Byron lines but at the same time enlarge it so that it could include the kind of material that he was interested in, which was to do with everyday life—politics, quarrels between people, sexual love, and not just the frustrated love he had with Maud Gonne.

INTERVIEWER

I believe you were an early admirer of Dylan Thomas.

SPENDER

I knew Dylan from very early on. In fact I was the first literary person he met in London. Edith Sitwell made the absurd claim that she'd discovered Dylan Thomas, which is

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rubbish. All she did was write a favorable review of his first book. There was a Sunday newspaper called *Reynolds' News* at that time, and it had a poetry column which was edited by a man called Victor Neuberg. He would publish poems sent in by readers. I always read this column, being very sympathetic with the idea of ordinary people writing poetry. And then in one issue I saw a poem which I thought was absolutely marvelous—it was about a train going through a valley. I was very moved by this poem, so I wrote to the writer in care of the column, and the writer wrote back. It was Dylan Thomas, and in his letter he said first of all that he admired my work, something which he never said again. Then he said he wanted to come up to London and that he wanted to make money—he was always rather obsessed by money. So I invited him to London and may have sent him his fare. I felt nervous about meeting him alone, which is what I should have done, so I invited my good friend William Plomer to have lunch with us. We took him to a restaurant in Soho. He was very pale and intense and nervous, and Plomer and I talked a lot of London gossip to prevent the meal from going in complete silence.

I think he probably stayed in London—he was a friend of Pamela Hansford Johnson, who became Lady Snow. Then, right at the end of his life, Dylan wrote me a letter saying he'd never forgotten that I was the first poet of my generation who met him. He was thanking me for some review I'd written—this was the most appreciative review he'd had in his life, I think he said, something like that. Mind you he probably wrote a dozen letters like that to people everyday. And he certainly said extremely mean things behind my back, of that I'm quite sure. I don't hold that against him at all—it was just his style. We all enjoy doing things like that. After those very early days I didn't see Dylan often; one reason is that I never get on well with alcoholics. Also he liked to surround himself with a kind of court which moved from pub to pub. And Dylan was expected to pay for everyone, which he always did, and he was expected to be "Dylan." Of

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course when I was at *Horizon* with Cyril Connolly, Dylan was always coming in, usually to borrow money. Richard Burton was funny telling me about Dylan. He was a young actor and absolutely without money. He would be playing somewhere and Dylan would turn up to borrow a pound. When he left, Burton would always hear a taxi carrying the pauper away.

INTERVIEWER

How well did you know Ernest Hemingway?

SPENDER

Hemingway I knew during the Spanish Civil War. He often turned up in Valencia and Madrid and other places where I happened to be. We would go for walks together, and then he'd talk about literature. He was marvelous as long as he didn't realize that he was talking about literature—I mean he'd say how the opening chapter of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* was the best description of war in literature—when Fabrizio gets lost, doesn't know where he is at all in the battle of Waterloo. Then I'd say, "Well, what do you think about *Henry IV*, do you think Shakespeare writes well about war?" "Oh, I've never read Shakespeare," he'd say. "What are you talking about—you seem to imagine I'm a professor or something. I don't read literature, I'm not a literary man"—that kind of thing.

He was very nice when one was alone with him, but the public Hemingway could be troublesome. On one occasion I remember we went into a bar where there were girls. Hemingway immediately took up a guitar and started strumming, being "Hemingway." One of the girls standing with him pointed at me and said, *"Tu amigo es muy guapo"*—your friend is very handsome. Hemingway became absolutely furious, bashed down the guitar and left in a rage. He was very like that. Another time, my first wife and I met him and Marty Gellhorn in Paris. They invited us to lunch, someplace where there were steaks and chips, things like that, but my wife ordered sweetbread. Also she wouldn't drink. So

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Hemingway said, "Your wife is yellow, that's what she is, she's yellow. Marty was like that, and do you know what I did? I used to take her to the morgue in Madrid every morning before breakfast." Well, the morgue in Madrid before breakfast really must have been something.

Hemingway always said of me, "You're O.K. All that's wrong with you is you're too squeamish." So he would describe modern war. He'd say, "If you think of modern war from the point of view of a pilot, the city that he's bombing isn't all these people whom you like to worry about, people who are going to suffer—it's just a mathematical problem. It's like shading in a circle with dark areas where you drop your bombs. You mustn't think of it in a sentimental way at all." At that same meeting in Paris, he told me again I was squeamish, and then he said, "This is something you ought to look at, it will do you good." He produced a packet of about thirty photographs of the most horrible murders, which he carried around in his pockets. This toughened one up in some way. He told me that what motivated him really while he was in Spain, wasn't so much enthusiasm about the Republic, but to test his own courage. He said, "Only if you actually go into battle and bullets are screeching all around you, can you know whether you're a coward or not." He had to prove to himself that he wasn't a coward. And he said, "Mind, you shit in your pants with fear. Everyone does that, but that isn't what counts." I don't remember quite what it is that counts—but he always wanted to test his own courage. Physical courage to him was a kind of absolute value.

INTERVIEWER

Given Auden's general air of superiority, a quality that seems to come through over and over, was it possible really to feel close to him as a human being?

SPENDER

Yes, because there was a kind of non-seriousness about Wystan, a kind of buffoonry, which undercut the superiority.

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He wasn't intellectually arrogant. He was extremely clever and quite demanding, I should say, and he criticized one's work with authority, but he never had the air of a critic. He really was a born teacher. He would say, "If I were you, I wouldn't put in the word 'like' here," for instance. Or, "That line's marvelous, but the rest is absolute trash." He'd talk like that, but he wouldn't give you the feeling that he was preaching at you. Of course I was a bit in awe of him, being two or three years younger than he was. But still there was a great deal of fun, of playfulness in all that he said. In fact his whole relationship with a person like Isherwood seemed one long farcical dialogue. If you'd heard our kind of conversation, it would probably have seemed quite frivolous. In fact, there always was a strong strain of frivolity, which one cannot imagine in a conversation, say, between F.R. Leavis and Mrs. Leavis about literature. He always had a deep-down desire not to be taken seriously. For instance, after the war, quite late on, he once gave me a terrific lecture about my behavior and my life. I was quite impressed by this, and so I said, "Oh, you are quite right Wystan, I think I'll change my whole life." He buried his head in his hands and said, "Please. What are you talking about? Don't you realize I'm not serious? I don't in the least want you to be any different from what you are. The thing that I can't bear about America is that everyone always takes me seriously."

There was a constant streak of absurdity about him. I stayed the night with him once in Greenwich Village, and when I got up in the morning, I naturally pulled the curtain. Immediately the whole thing—curtains, rods, everything—clattered to the floor. Auden said, "Why on earth did you draw the curtain?" And I said, "Well, because I wanted the daylight." And he said, "I never draw the curtain, I just always leave it closed." About two weeks later I returned, and the curtain was still on the floor, exactly where it had fallen. Auden always had a sort of Beatrix Potter quality to him, a sort of Mrs. Tickeltedemal. And that he was camp—I mean it is difficult to think of a serious critic who is camp,

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isn't it? Oscar Wilde, for instance, would not give you a serious lecture on first principles of literary criticism. You'd have to take yourself so seriously.

Another interesting thing about Auden is he didn't like seeing people in twos and threes. He'd put up with a party, quite enjoy it, as a kind of ceremony. But otherwise he liked seeing one alone, and he really resented another person being introduced into the situation. On one occasion I was to have dinner with him in Greenwich Village. Well, I ran into an old friend of ours from Oxford, Rex Warner, so I rang up Auden and asked if I could bring him to dinner. Auden said, "Yes, of course, bring him along." This was about ten o'clock at night, when I rang him, and Auden was probably drunk. Anyhow, he forgot completely about it, and when I turned up with Rex Warner, he just looked at him and said, "Why are you here?" So I said, "You invited Rex." "No I didn't. I never invited Rex. I expected you." Then he said, "Anyhow there's nothing for Rex to eat. There's only enough for Stephen and me." Then he recovered himself a bit and said, "Well, never mind, I'll eat some hamburger or something. Stephen and you can have the two chops I've prepared." He did this in a very ostentatious way. Poor Rex was deeply hurt.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard Auden could be selfish or miserly in small ways.

SPENDER

An important thing to remember is that most people who are famous have a kind of public relations side to their character; they are careful to hide certain things about themselves. But Auden didn't care. For instance, one of the things he most detested was people taking his cigarettes. On one occasion he was staying on Ischia when a yacht I was travelling on called there. In the course of the afternoon which I spent with him, I happened to take one of his cigarettes. He said, "Why don't you have cigarettes of your

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own?'' And I said, ''As a matter of fact, I would have bought some but I don't have any Italian money—I have just English money with me.'' ''Well,'' he said, ''I'd be happy to change some for you. Give me a pound.'' Then he looked up the rate of exchange in the *Herald-Tribune*, and he said, ''Well my dear, I am afraid the pound's doing very badly. I can only give you a hundred lira, but now you can go downstairs and buy some cigarettes.'' If you wanted to make up a story to show the utter stinginess of someone, you could not do better than that. But then a few months later, Auden was staying with us in the country, in England. Our daughter at that time was always talking about having a horse. But we couldn't quite afford it, so Auden said, ''Well look, Stephen, what Lizzie wants most in this world is a horse. Here's fifty pounds towards buying her one.'' This was the same person. I don't think it is so odd, what he did. What is odd is that he made no attempt to conceal the odd quirk of meanness.

INTERVIEWER

In your new book, you speak of Herbert Read describing Eliot as lacking in affection for perhaps everyone. Did you find him to be this cold a person?

SPENDER

No. He was extremely discriminating and mannered, I should say, and his life was very much governed by conventions of behavior. One would never ring him and say, ''May I come 'round and see you?'' Everything had to be elaborate and courteous. But I think that he was quite affectionate, in a rather remote way, towards people. I think probably Herbert Read felt like a junior partner to Eliot all his life. He seemed to resent the fact that Eliot had a greater reputation than he did, that people read Eliot's poems but not Herbert Read's. He didn't seem to understand that Eliot was much better than he was. I was in a rather similar position in regard to Auden, but in my case I did have a very clear idea that Auden was much better than I, which prevented me

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from resenting him. Eliot himself, to some extent, didn't understand his own reputation and thought of it as a bit unfair. He once told me that he felt Conrad Aiken had all his own qualities, that he was as serious and as dedicated, and that all of his life he'd felt it an injustice that he'd got so much attention while Conrad Aiken had been so neglected. But I don't think he felt that about Herbert Read.

I think Eliot was fond of me and of other people, but he was always rather distant. I mean if one gets on fairly good terms with someone, you immediately feel that you know them well. There is a kind of break-in period, after which, instead of just being an acquaintance, you somehow feel that you know the person completely. Well, Eliot never allowed one to have that feeling. There was nothing casual in his relationships. Of course, he had confidantes—Geoffrey Faber, who was his closest friend and his partner in Faber and Faber, probably knew him better than anyone. He certainly knew more about Eliot and his troubles with his first wife than anyone else did. Yet it was Geoffrey Faber who drew my attention to a story of Richard Aldington's which is obviously about Eliot. It describes a man who has a completely spurious reputation but who manipulates it very adroitly. He has a wife whom he treats with extreme correctitude but without any sort of warmth or passion; he freezes the relationship between them through his conventionality and his perfect manners. It is an odious portrait, really; and Aldington was a man of no talent. The funny thing is that Faber said, "If you really want to understand Eliot, read that story—there's a streak of truth about that." He said that early on, certainly before Eliot's second marriage. Eliot changed greatly with his second marriage. But of course one has also to remember that Faber himself was a rather stuffy, correct man with strangely-repressed passions. I think another important thing about Eliot is that he was one of those people who is always acting himself, his own role, whatever he is at a given moment. The poet who is a bank clerk, the perfect gentleman, all that sort of thing. And I think this element of acting was inseparable from the irony and made other people conscious of the irony.

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INTERVIEWER

That sounds like trying to "put on a face to meet the faces that you meet."

SPENDER

That's it exactly, yes.

INTERVIEWER

Eliot made such a point of the impersonality of poetry, especially of his own poetry, and yet there seems to be a resemblance between the character of Eliot and that personality, even neurotic personality, which is projected in "Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, and some of his other early poems. Do you think that maybe he was violating his own rule, that actually there is more of his own personality in those poems than he would let on?

SPENDER

Yes. I think he indicated as much really when he later described *The Waste Land* as "one man's grouse." But at the same time one has to remember that nearly all of Eliot's early criticism is extremely polemical, and so if he says that poetry has to be impersonal it's because he's thinking of the Georgian poets, who made a cult of self-expression. They were all wearing their hearts on their sleeves; their poetry was written to show that you were a poet in your whole being. When I was young, if you talked to those people about a poem, they'd say, "Oh, yes, the poet is there, the poet is in those lines." A poem like, say, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is exactly that, really. It's the poet being The Poet in the poem and the poem being inseparable from the poet and the reader liking the poem because he's put in contact with the poet. I think it's that view of poetry which Eliot is really reacting against. In fact, what he's always saying is that a poem ought to be made objectively, with tools and technique, as a carpenter turns a table leg with a lathe. And of course when he talks about the impersonality of the poet,

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if you'll remember, he puts in an escape clause at the end. He says, "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things"—which is very sly, and shows in a way that he has his tongue in his cheek.

This also has to do with the international movement towards modernism, which goes back to the 1890s. In English poetry, this means a strong French influence through such things as Arthur Symons' book on the symbolists. From all this comes the idea of the persona or the mask, the idea that the poet must never be himself in his poetry, but must invent an artificial self, must be a mysterious person whom other people don't understand. Laforgue had this idea, and Eliot completely identified with Laforgue. In fact, his second marriage was held in the same church in London where Laforgue had been married. For myself, I can't imagine inventing a persona. I think it was very much something that generation did. Of course the most elaborate mask of all is Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberly. It is elaborate to the point of confusion and one wonders whether it doesn't really show a kind of mental confusion on Pound's part.

INTERVIEWER

You say that Eliot was the most approachable and helpful poet of his generation to younger poets. Was he helpful to you when you were a younger poet?

SPENDER

Yes, he was. The letters he wrote to me when he was a young man—they were the letters of a person with real affection and real concern. He was also a bit of a taskmaster, saying "You ought to discipline yourself," and so on. But he was always very kind to us, always helpful. Occasionally one got upset about things the critics wrote about one's work. Eliot always stood by one, and said, "Why do you worry about that? Just ignore them. This work will add to your reputation." In a rather unobtrusive way, he couldn't have been more encouraging.

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INTERVIEWER

I take it that the editors of *Scrutiny* were not similarly encouraging.

SPENDER

No, they weren't. When I was in the London Fire Service, there was a fellow fireman who would never really look at me. And then one day he said, "Don't you realize who I am?" His name was Peacock. Then he said, "Well, I'm the person who wrote that terrible attack on your first book in *Scrutiny*." And he said, "The reason I did it was because I was instructed by Leavis to do it, and told exactly what to say." So it was a very different kind of thing. I think that Eliot might have given us a bit more criticism, as a matter of fact. No one knows to this day what Eliot really thought about Auden's poetry. Well of course he admired it, and he published it, but he never really said anything about it. He was rather mysterious about it.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think Leavis would have that kind of attitude? Was he just the kind of person who loves to attack young poets?

SPENDER

A great difficulty about criticism is that critics really form their judgments on the basis of past work, don't they? You may be an extremely good critic of past work but totally incapable of judging modern or contemporary work. A critic always feels that his knowledge, which may be vast, and the critical standards which he has derived from a study of past work, ought to apply. And so he will only like the kind of work by living writers in which they do apply. This argument is obviously based on a false logic. One may be an extremely good judge of art, say, up to 1910, but be incapable of judging later work because it contains an element which is unprecedented in the art which one is able to judge. When I

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was editing *Encounter,* I once asked Auden whether I shouldn't write to Leavis and ask him to write a column in which he'd be competely free to say whatever he liked. And Auden said, "That would be extremely irresponsible of you, because, although he is a very good judge of what he likes, Leavis is quite incapable of judging what he doesn't like. So you'd get good criticism of the things that he liked and then you'd get savage attacks on things that don't happen to come within his conspectus."

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned your critic, Mr. Peacock of the Fire Brigade. Did you not know who he was because you'd never met him before or because you hadn't paid any particular attention to his attack on your work?

SPENDER

No, I'd been very upset by it. I think one has to remember that attacking writers, especially when they are young, may be extremely damaging to them. I myself was very discouraged by the attacks of *Scrutiny* and other things like that. Of course it is difficult to decide, because on the other hand I think that criticism has to be centered, you have to have standards, don't you? My own experience of criticism is that of course one sometimes attacks something because one thinks the work criticized may be very bad. But there's always an element of pleasure in doing this. I think an attack is never really objective. What you say may be objective, your standards may be objective, but there is actually a kind of pleasure nevertheless, which is a strongly subjective element. Of course critics pretend that this isn't so, but I think it is so, and it is very difficult for a critic to resist that.

INTERVIEWER

Doing frank reviews, and especially having negative things to say about people who were your friends, did that ever cause you trouble? Did you ever find that a difficult thing to do?

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SPENDER

Well, it probably annoyed them on occasion, but my friends always behaved very nicely to me; they never held it against me and very rarely showed their annoyance. Auden himself had total self-confidence, of course. He just thought that he was cleverer than anyone else, but without arrogance really, just out of his own judgment, which may or may not have been right, but which nevertheless was never arrogant: He knew exactly what he was doing, and he was totally indifferent to what anyone said about it. And then being a "psychoanalyst" helped him a great deal. For instance, when he was so attacked by Randall Jarrell in 1947 or so, he said, "He must be in love with me; I can't think of any other explanation." Well, that isn't what one usually thinks about being attacked in print. He was genuinely puzzled. He didn't think it was a damaging attack in any way.

INTERVIEWER

You have been an editor yourself, especially well-known for your years at *Encounter,* from which you resigned in some heat.

SPENDER

Encounter was supported by an organization called the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was funded by about forty different foundations. Irving Kristol and I were the first editors of the magazine, then Irving went back to America and I stayed on with another American editor whose name I won't mention. In 1968, with all the exposure about the CIA, it was revealed that these foundations were simply channeling money for the CIA. So the two English editors, Frank Kermode and I, we both resigned. *Encounter* was a good magazine, and we editors had a free hand with what we published. So lots of people used to ask, 'what was wrong with the CIA connection?' What was wrong with it was that we ought to have known.

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INTERVIEWER

To get back to the people that you've known, did you have much contact with Ezra Pound?

SPENDER

In around 1936, I was in Rapallo, so I wrote to Pound saying I wanted to come and see him, but I never got any reply. There may have been hundreds of reasons for that—probably it was because he thought I was a hopeless case of leftism and he didn't like my poetry anyhow. But I saw him when he was in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and he was then always extremely friendly. Then I used to see him every year for some years at the Spoleto Festival. He recognized in Gian Carlo Menotti a person who really patronized the arts in a quite sacrificial way. He practically never said anything, but on one occasion did say something which moved me very much. About five or seven poets, two of whom were Ezra and myself, all read their poems, and at the end of the reading, as we moved off the platform, Ezra Pound took my arm and said, "Why do you and I do this? We realize it's all vanity and useless." Then he said, "Oh for a touch of real sincerity." I was rather touched that he said that to me.

INTERVIEWER

But of the Pound who directed the course of modern poetry for so many years, or supposedly did, you did not see that side of Pound?

SPENDER

No. I think Pound had very little influence on the English poets of my generation. He did not mean much to Auden, I know. Auden really just couldn't be bothered with *The Cantos,* I think. I've grown to admire Pound, but only in patches. I've been reading *The Cantos* again recently, and to me they are unrelated lyric poems of very great beauty—marvelous language and also this marvelous feeling for light in the Mediterranean. I think what does come through is his wonderful reverence for civilization—Mediter-

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ranean civilization. I once asked him about *The Cantos.* I said, "Will there be a complete edition of *The Cantos?*" This was in the 1950s. And he said, "Forget about them, just forget about them."

INTERVIEWER

Do you think he was turning his back on them?

SPENDER

I think that Pound, when he became silent, was undergoing some kind of remorse, and I think he probably felt that his whole political career and his arrogance had been a terrible mistake. Perhaps as a result of that he condemned everything that he wrote during that period. That's a possible explanation. Of course it may have been a result of mental illness. And it may have been both.

INTERVIEWER

I want to ask you about the politics of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound. Do you think that there is possibly an incredible level of naïveté in their politics, as though for them politics was a game or a symbolic or even aesthetic activity, in which they ignored the realities of fascism?

SPENDER

Yes. I think you might call their politics the politics of civilization, or of their concept of civilization. They connected the idea of civilization with the idea of tradition. The logic of this position, which is a cultural position, is that, if challenged, you have to extend it into politics. If you extend it into politics, the only people whom you can admire are the reactionaries. It is very much this way with T.S. Eliot. His attitude towards the external world of society originally was taken from Baudelaire. What he got from Baudelaire was a hatred of the idea of progress and industrialization and a hatred of the materialism of middle-class society. Baudelaire was also a classicist writing in a modern idiom—writing the poetry of the city in the language of Racine. So in these re-

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spects, Baudelaire was the model for Eliot, who in any case looked very largely to France for his view of civilization and politics.

So when Eliot, Yeats, and Pound looked around in the contemporary world for leaders to admire, they found such guardians of the tradition as Mussolini, Franco, and General O'Duffy. But from our point of view, it wasn't serious. I think we would have felt antagonistic to the politics of Eliot and Pound and Yeats if we'd regarded them seriously as Fascists, but we couldn't do so, even today, although Pound in particular considerably incriminated himself by supporting Mussolini and being very anti-Semitic. But we admired these writers so much as writers. And even from the cultural point of view, one could admire their attitude. It was simply the extension of it into political action that we didn't agree with. One thing we used to discuss in the 1930s was whether a Fascist could be a good writer. We always decided that he couldn't because Fascism was stupid and inhuman. So by definition a person who was a good writer might call himself a Fascist, but couldn't really be one.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you also later decide that a programmatic Communist could not be a good writer?

SPENDER

Yes. In the early days, though, before the nature of Stalinism became apparent, there was a lot we admired about Soviet art. We admired Soviet movies extremely, and I think they had a great influence on my work, perhaps also on Isherwood's work. Christopher Isherwood and I used to study the Berlin newspapers to see what Russian movies there were, and we'd always go and see them. Their imagery, using industrial machinery as a kind of poetic symbolism, like the tractor, the railway engine, factory chimneys, that kind of thing, to us was rather heroic.

The language used by the government itself, on the other hand, was so consistently stilted. A friend of mine in the

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Spanish Civil War, a Communist in the International Brigade, used to laugh about the Communists for their hackneyed propaganda. He said that on one occasion someone got up at a meeting and said, "Comrades, let's send a spontaneous telegram to Stalin."

INTERVIEWER

With respect to Communist literature and the rather hard words you have had for some of it, would you revise this at all in view of more contemporary writers like Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, and perhaps even Pablo Neruda?

SPENDER

Well, I cannot really consider Pablo Neruda a Communist at all. His kind of communism was almost entirely rhetorical; he was a sort of highly privileged propagandist. He was banqueted all the time by the Russians, was given all sorts of awards in Russia, and so on. I refused to review his autobiography because he treats all this so casually. As for the others, I've never been able to admire Yevtushenko. I consider him to be an operator. On the other hand it may be that, in a devious way, he is working for greater freedom in Russia. Of course the same applies to Voznesensky, whom I prefer to Yevtushenko, but I'm not a Russian scholar. Then there is Joseph Brodsky, whom I'm very fond of and admire greatly. He holds extreme anti-Soviet views which I would hold if I were in his position. I think it is a tragedy that the Russian defectors turn out to be so anti-Communist that they consider the Western anti-Communists, people like Nixon, as comparative weaklings.

INTERVIEWER

As a poet with a passionate interest in world politics, does it seem to you that poetry can have any real effect on society or its direction?

SPENDER

I think only in certain situations. For instance, always at the

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beginning of a war there is a demand from editors that poets should write war poetry. This comes from a recognition that, in a situation in which patriotic feelings are required, poetry may stimulate those feelings. I imagine the sonnets of Rupert Brooke at the beginning of the First World War probably did make some people join up to fight the Germans. During the Spanish Civil War, the poetry that was written probably helped the International Brigade. Then in a much wider sense poetry can be politically effective as well. Surely one can trace the sources of the movement for Italian unity to the fact that Dante decided to write *The Divine Comedy* in idiomatic Italian and not in Latin, which would have been the correct thing for him to have done. And Goethe, who created, really all by himself, modern German literature, also contributed greatly to the idea of German unity through doing this. He created a German culture and taught Germans that they could respect themselves in relation to France, especially, and other countries.

But I think it is wrong to believe that poetry is really very effective in politics. And politics can certainly be very bad for poetry. I was discussing this with Denise Levertov when she was here. She read a political poem, which was based on her visiting Hanoi and being taken 'round by the North Vietnamese to see damage done to hospitals by American aircraft. Of course she had extremely strong feelings about this, and I don't want to call it just a propaganda operation on the part of the North Vietnamese, but somehow to enter almost as a tourist into that kind of suffering and to make propaganda out of it is not what a poet should be doing. For a journalist it's all right, but a poet has to go in for an act of the imagination, which is on a deeper level. I mean, if you penetrate to the depths of the suffering, you see that it is not just inflicted by one side; it's something that human beings do to one another. Also if you write what one has to call propaganda poetry, you lay yourself open to a kind of argument which is all right in politics but which oughtn't to occur in poetry. Someone will say, "Well, if the North Vietnamese had had airplanes, they'd have done the same

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thing,'' which you can't really dispute. I don't think that poets ought to get themselves into that kind of argument.

There are, of course, political situations so absolutely unspeakable that they become quite literally unimaginable. It would be impertinent, for example, to imagine what was happening in the concentration camps during the 1930s and 1940s. The only way to know that suffering was to be a part of it, but if you became a part of it, you were destroyed. As a matter of fact, at the end of the concentration camp era, when various poets, particularly in Poland, emerged from the camps, they hated poetry. They regarded poetry as the greatest betrayal because it always in some way offers pleasure. It would therefore have to extract some kind of comfort, something pleasurable, from all these horrors. And so they started writing what they called anti-poetry.

INTERVIEWER

What about the effect of war on poets who were not as closely involved?

SPENDER

In some ways war is a suspension of every other activity which makes life interesting, like art and conversation. Also, war is a kind of dictatorship, one cannot say certain things. On the other hand, though, in London during the war there was a blackout; one saw the stars, and all that was very charming. Some of the descriptions which came out of the war had a sort of Surrealist effect. One felt during the war that Surrealism had come true.

INTERVIEWER

To turn to another subject, there was, in the 1920s, an intense migration of American writers to Europe. Then, in the 1940s and later, we find many English writers—Auden, Isherwood, Gunn, yourself—migrating from England to America. How does one account for this?

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SPENDER

Well, I think in a Marxist way one ought to say that both migrations had some economic basis. The Americans went in large numbers because they could live very cheaply in Europe in the 1920s. Because of the tremendous inflation in France, the American writers could eat French food, enjoy French mistresses, and absorb French civilization at a very low price. Then for those of us who have come this way across the Atlantic, there again is a very strong economic reason. And that is that, for just being what we are, being poets and doing a little teaching and lecturing, we can make a living in America. In fact, we are rather handsomely rewarded in America. This simply did not happen before the war in England, where you'd be rather surprised to get even ten dollars for giving a lecture or reading. Today you get up to a hundred dollars for giving a reading, simply because the whole thing is subsidized by the Arts Council. That is one reason. Another is the excitement of America, the pleasure of finding oneself with American colleagues. I think I've talked much more about poetry and about things I care for with American colleagues than I ever have with English ones—whole generations of them. America is, among the poets, a place where everything is openly discussed, and it's really immensely more interesting than the scene in England.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a greater serious audience for poetry in America than in England?

SPENDER

The United States, when it takes it seriously, takes it deadly seriously. In England, on the other hand, no one would expect it to be taken seriously. An English poet writes, I think, just for people who are interested in poetry. An American poet writes, and feels that everyone ought to appreciate this. Then he has a deep sense of grievance, because he may only be appreciated by two thousand people.

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One of my great surprises when I was in America was about twenty-five years ago in Harvard, hearing Randall Jarrell deliver a bitter attack on the way poets were neglected. Yet there were about two thousand people present, and he was being paid $500 for delivering this attack.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know Robert Frost?

SPENDER

I met him only two or three times. He had a number of sides to his nature, as we know, including a very black one. He showed me his vain side. I had to give a dinner party for him, and had someone bellow in his ear the names of all the other people and had all their place names written out very large so he could see them at the table. He sat next to E.M. Forster, and asked, "And what magazine do you write for?" He just didn't take these people seriously, and didn't bother to find out who they were.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that there is a strong American influence in the work of Ted Hughes, but also that there is a good deal of Englishness about his work. I'm not, in asking this question, particularly interested just in Hughes's work, but rather in the terms, the qualities you are talking about. What characteristics do you have in mind when you speak of American and English qualities in poetry?

SPENDER

The American to me would be the kind of turned-on, confessional aspect of Hughes, the violence really. The English would be that he is still very much a nature poet. He lives in Devonshire and writes poetry about the countryside, very beautiful I think, which I consider to be a very English kind of thing. Of course American poets write nature poetry, but not in the same way. English nature poetry has a more rooted

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quality, more the feeling that the poet lives in this landscape, has always lived in this landscape. But in quite a lot of recent American poetry about nature, say Gary Snyder's, you feel that he has only just arrived with his knapsack and tent. I suppose that Frost was much more like an English poet in this respect, and maybe this is why he was first published in England and was so very much admired in England.

INTERVIEWER

It has been said that, over the last twenty or thirty years, American poetry has been more lively than British poetry. What do you think of this hypothesis?

SPENDER

Well, there's been a great deal more of it. As material I should think it is more interesting to read, but that might be true of journalism also. On the whole, America since 1950 or so has been the place where things happen. America has, in the twentieth century, very much the role England had in the nineteenth. England in the nineteenth century was where the consequences of the industrial revolution were most acutely felt. Therefore all English literature of the nineteenth century, including poetry, contains a great deal of news about the problems of living with child labor and the destruction of the landscape and that kind of thing. This is essentially what you find in American poetry of this century—things like reacting to pollution and trying to heat up personal values through confession or drugs or any kind of stimulus in order to compete with the depersonalization caused by the industrial society. Of course it is interesting and exciting. I think as a matter of fact that some of the best English poets, particularly Philip Larkin, are making a virtue of the unexcitingness of England, insisting on the quietness of England.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking of Larkin, you have written of the insular type of English poetry, citing Betjeman and Larkin as examples, a

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type of poetry which Donald Davie speaks of in his book on the Hardy tradition. You've also said that you yourself are not of this type. How would you characterize yourself, your own work?

SPENDER

I think I'm international—I've always thought that I was. When I was young, the feeling for Englishness, for being English, was so strong that I inevitably felt like a foreigner. I'm one quarter German-Jewish, a quarter German, and half English. In America this wouldn't mean anything, but in the England of the upper classes and middle classes when I grew up, before the 1930s, this made me feel like a foreigner. I was always very conscious of Englishness, as though it were something very beautiful, worthy of one's strongest admiration, but just a little apart from myself. I always felt twice as much alive the moment I left England. The excitement of just waking up in the morning and thinking, "This is foreign, I'm abroad," has always been very stimulating. I think that's why I've always been going abroad, getting away from England.

INTERVIEWER

Early in your life, Auden told you, apparently at Oxford, that you were essentially an autobiographer, as a writer. This is something that you have mentioned periodically throughout your career, accepting the characterization. I think that most readers, looking at your career, recognizing the many prose works that you have written, would still say that poetry is at the center of your achievement and is what holds it all together. What do you think of this; is it poetry or is it autobiography that lies at the heart of your career?

SPENDER

I don't at all regret having written autobiography, and hope to write more of it one day. What I do regret is that I've spent so much time writing criticism rather than writing more

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creative works. I am quite well qualified as a critic, and I suppose I have quite a lot of critical sensibility. I also have a rather inventive mind, and I keep on thinking of fascinating ideas for books. I ought to think them up for other people to write rather than me. *Love-Hate Relations* is a good example of this. It's a very good idea for a book, but, because I didn't really have the time to read all the matter, I found it a tremendous chore after having started it. Someone else could have done it so much more easily than I, and without sacrificing other work. What I really do reproach myself for is that I ever wrote a successful critical work as a young man; *The Destructive Element* was published when I was twenty-six, in 1936. I wish it had been so bad that I'd have had to stop, but it was sort of half-good and rather helped me along. Really, it all came from accepting advances. Publishers will offer you advances for a book of that kind, but not for other kinds of books. So what I really think is that I ought to have written novels, plays, stories, poems, anything that was creative. Writing autobiography is rather inhibiting in two ways. First of all, you are writing about yourself, and I've always felt the egotism is indecent, even though I have such quantities of it. I can't bear to read aloud poems of mine which are very autobiographical—some of them I think are my best poems, but I just can't read them aloud to an audience. And secondly, of course, autobiography tends to be self-consuming and repetitious. An autobiographical writer is constantly using up his material, or he is constantly wanting to use the same material again. The same anecdote will fit into thirty or forty different pieces, you see.

As regards poetry, I'm feeling very self-critical at this stage in my life. I feel that I understand my work much better than I did and my whole life much better than I did. I think that a lot of my poetry was spoiled by my not knowing how to write my own kind of poem. I think that I only really grasp it now. For instance, I recently looked again at a poem of mine called "The Marginal Field." It is about the theory of economics which describes something called "the margin of profit."

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There is a field somewhere, say, where it is just worth sowing corn because, although it is terribly stony and unproductive, you can just make a profit out of it. Somehow there are certain ideas in economics, and even in politics, which are true as economics but also true as poetic metaphors. So I wrote this poem, which is really quite beautiful in theory, in which I describe a field at the edge of cliffs. The person who is tilling it is sheeted in sweat and thinking about another field, which is very profitable, where the corn is waving and golden. Now looking at that poem, I thought, "Oh, I must write that poem." It's as though it wasn't written at all; I think perhaps I can still write that poem. The reason I couldn't write it then is because I was unable to draw a clear enough distinction between the abstract part of the poem and the imagistic richness of the poem. I just didn't know how to work at it really. I have always worked rather hard at my poems, and I feel now that I know how to work. I feel that if I'd written much more poetry without worrying whether it was good or bad, and been prepared to make many more mistakes, I'd have been much better off in the end. But I've always felt terribly sensitive to criticism, and I've suffered agonies from critical remarks. I've always felt that perhaps it's true, I oughtn't to do this, I'm not a poet. And that can be really inhibiting. There's a marvelous remark in *The Pisan Cantos,* where Pound, in his mood of contrition, talks about his arrogance, his pride, saying "Pull down thy vanity." But then he immediately answers himself with the opposite opinion, which says that if you accept a negative evaluation of yourself, then you will never accomplish anything: "Here the error is all in the not done, all in the diffidence that faltered." I felt tremendously the force of those lines when I first read them, and have had them in my mind ever since.

INTERVIEWER

You have said of many poets that you had the sense when you read their work, poets who were dead, at the end of their careers, that they hadn't started yet. Is this in the back of your mind as you talk about your own career?

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SPENDER

Yes. I want to do another autobiography, revise *World within World* and make it about twice as long. That's an important aim I have. And I want to do this play. Then I'd like to do a proper volume of collected poems, and write many more poems. That's about it. It would be nice just to have about three books which were really worthwhile.

INTERVIEWER

Robert Lowell, in a review of Stanley Kunitz's book *The Testing Tree,* spoke of the movement towards a more relaxed, more open, less formal verse as "the drift of our age." Do you feel that your work has evolved in this direction?

SPENDER

No, not at all. And if it is the drift of our age, then I am in favor of going against the age. I have a strong feeling that the interesting new poet would be formal and even artificial, someone who would push language always to the point where it has the fascination of artifice and is not just straightforward. If Lowell hadn't believed that, he probably would have written much better poetry in the last twenty years of his life. I think he suffered from a compulsion rather like Picasso towards the end of his life, to overproduce simply to prove to himself that he was the greatest poet producing the greatest quantity of poetry. I think he produced much of his best poetry when he was under pressure of his illness. But in later years he was getting drugs which kept him sort of half-ill, half-well the whole time, and so his poetry came to lack pressure. Then he should have written less and concentrated more on just a few poems. Some of his later poems are very good, but many are not, and someone is going to have to make a careful selection. During the next few years there's likely to be a bad backlash against Lowell. But he'll come back, because, after all, he was one of the most distinguished and interesting poets of his time. However lax he became, there was still his tone of voice; you always hear him speaking, and this is exactly what lacks in the people who criticize

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him. A distinctive tone of voice is one of the rarest things in poetry; I think it is what makes the great poet.

INTERVIEWER

Many writers of your generation are now gone. John Berryman used to speak in his romantic way about being a "lone survivor." How do you feel about being, in a sense, the survivor of your generation?

SPENDER

I feel that I ought to do my best as representative of my generation. I have even thought that I oughtn't to write anything which is a waste of the reader's time any more. I often feel, in a mysterious way, that I am showing my work to members of my generation, writing it for them, particularly Auden because I was closest to him. Perhaps I might just say something about the writers I am usually classified with. Cecil Day Lewis I liked very much, though I never quite understood why he wrote the kind of poetry he did. It always seemed to me that he was over literary in some way, that he was somehow turning his experiences into literature as he lived them, long before actually writing about them.

Louis MacNeice was tremendously gifted, I think, a most marvelously gifted technician. I think it's significant that one of his best works is his translation of *Faust*. It is a marvelous English poem, very close to Goethe in language and even in its shifts of meter, which is miraculous considering he didn't know German. He did the translation with a friend who did know German. I've always thought that MacNeice had limitations of temperament. He sometimes seems to be writing a jazzy, crazy kind of poetry, but when you look closer you realize that it's always perfectly controlled. Inside MacNeice there was always an academic scholar pulling in the rein. He was actually a very reticent man. In his autobiography, he reveals that his mother went mad when he was very young, and I think that the effect of this was to repress his emotional life and to make him avoid at all costs the confessional.

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Auden seemed the man of very real genius, very great talent. It is curious that, when we were at Oxford together, he knew almost nothing about form, so the poems he wrote then are really free verse. I remember him once showing me a poem which he said was a sonnet. I asked him why he called it a sonnet, and he said, "Because it only has eleven lines." Then he suddenly began to study form, to the point where he became a virtuoso. I think his mastery of form is what allowed him to incorporate ideology, his ideas, into his poetry so that he eventually became an intellectual, meditative poet. He was very conscious of his own mental superiority. Once I happened to remark to Auden how, when one is a child, one somehow establishes one's position in relation to the other children by knowing whether they are cleverer than you or not. Auden looked at me in an odd way and said, "I always knew that I was brighter than anyone else." I think he did always know that, and it affected him greatly. I think that my relationship to him was very much that of a less clever younger brother. I had two elder brothers who have died. One was a scientist, an incredibly competent person who knew all about machinery, engineering, that kind of thing. As long as he was alive I couldn't do anything, I couldn't even drive a car. And in some funny way, the death of Auden has seemed a release to me. I never resented being overshadowed by Auden, but at the same time I think it held me back. Auden was also very preoccupying. When he went back to live in England, we saw a great deal of him, and if you saw Auden it was difficult to do anything else. He was rather temperamental and required quite a lot of attention, demanded great punctuality at meals, that kind of thing. So if Auden announced he was going to come and stay for three weeks, although I was delighted because it was nice to have him there, I also knew that I wouldn't be able to work for three weeks. He had that sort of effect on me—on everyone in fact.

INTERVIEWER

There is a generation of American poets who seemed to feel

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that it was necessary to be unhappy to write poetry, to be alcoholic and even suicidal. How do you feel about that?

SPENDER

I should have said really quite the opposite. I think it's almost a duty to be happy. Unhappiness is something one can absolutely count on; one is bound to have a great many worries and one is bound to be very conscious of other people's unhappiness. To me it seems important to realize that other people's unhappiness is probably greater than one's own, that there's a scale of unhappiness in the world. To me it is the attitude of a very spoiled person even to say, "I'm unhappy." It seems really astonishing, in the age in which there've been concentration camps and seven million people asphixiated, that people can seek unhappiness. Also I do see very much the point of Yeats. That if you're writing a tragic poetry, the unhappier it is, the more energetic and the more vitalizing you must make the language. You don't want to make the reader identify with your own unhappiness, but to make him enjoy the depiction of unhappiness in some way, perhaps to make it cathartic. I think this is one of the profoundest things in Yeats. It led him to rather brutal utterances sometimes, but I think that when you apply this say to Shakespeare, to Lear, it throws real light on the fact that one very much enjoys King Lear's misery. And the more miserable Lear is, the more magnificent the language, and the more enjoyable.

INTERVIEWER

Could you say something about the process of writing a poem? What comes first? A line? The intellectual concept?

SPENDER

Often, a very vivid memory, usually visual, which suggests that it could be realized in concentrated written language, in a form which is adumbrated dimly, not yet clear. . . to be discovered. Above all, the feeling that the poem is *there*—if

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only I can release it. When I write a poem I do not know consciously how it will develop, but I feel I know this unconsciously. Writing is the gradual revelation of a wholeness already felt when one has the idea for the poem.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example of this?

SPENDER

Well, there are two theories of inspiration. One idea is that poetry can actually be dictated to you, like it was to William Blake. You are in a hallucinated state, and you hear a voice or you are in communication with something outside, like James Merrill's new poem, which he says is dictated through the Ouija board by Auden and other people.

The other idea is Paul Valery's, what he calls *une ligne donnée,* that you are given one line and you try to follow up this clue, pulling the whole poem out of it. My own experience is that a rhythm or something comes into my head which I feel I must do, I must write it, create it.

For example, I recall looking out of a railway window and seeing an industrial landscape, factories, slag heaps, and the line coming into my head, "A language of flesh and roses." The thought at the back of this was that the industrial landscape was a language, what people have made out of nature, the contrast of nature and the industrial, "A language of flesh and roses." The problem of the poem was to work this connection out, trying to go back to remember what you really thought at that instant, and trying to recreate it. If I think of a poem, I may spend six months writing, but what I am really trying to do is remember what I thought of at that instant.

INTERVIEWER

Can you finish a poem in a burst? Or is revising a large part of the creative process?

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SPENDER

Occasionally, I can write a poem straight off. Usually I revise a great deal—a hundred or more rewritings. One good remark Virginia Woolf makes somewhere in her journals is that too much rewriting is symptomatic of a failure of imagination. *Mea culpa.* But if you put a poem aside, when you look at it again it tends to rewrite itself, because your remembered intention criticizes the failures of expression.

INTERVIEWER

What are the disciplines necessary to keep working on a poem for an extended period of time?

SPENDER

The poet Walter de la Mare said that if there is a leak of attention when you are trying to concentrate, the leak can be stifled by smoking a cigarette, or in Schiller's case, by inhaling the rotten apples which he kept in a drawer.

INTERVIEWER

Is a poem ever truly completed? Can you read over what you've done without wanting to worry it some more?

SPENDER

If poems have been anthologized a lot, I feel they probably should not be touched—they do not belong to me. Other poems I want to change if I feel that things in them are a false or incompletely expressed memory of what I intended to write. A poem may, if one is happy with it, lay a ghost to rest by one's expressing objectively something which one needs to express subjectively.

INTERVIEWER

What do you make of Virginia Woolf's somewhat peremptory insistence that one should not publish before the age of thirty?

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SPENDER

I think all she meant was that she hadn't published before she was thirty, so she didn't think anyone else should do so.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder if you could say what the most common faults of experienced poets might be?

SPENDER

The most common fault of experienced poets is that they acquire facility which reduces tension in their art. Tension usually comes from the sense of difficulty—that the poet has to struggle with language and form.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have to bother with any rituals?

SPENDER

The only important ritual for me is to write in such a way that I shut out all consciousness of my public. Journalism is for the public; poetry is a kind of secret vice. If someone asks me what I am writing, I hate to say "a poem."

INTERVIEWER

Robert Lowell once said that it is harder to be a good man than a great poet. He seemed to feel that there is something about being a poet that makes leading a normal life unusually difficult. What do you think of this notion?

SPENDER

Well, it is hard to be a good man, of course, and a poet is perhaps especially conscious of this. The great poet or writer is faced by the dilemma that in order to accomplish his art he must be a selfish person. Think how James Joyce, for instance, sacrificed his family. The poet may feel he is justified in doing something because his art demands it. On

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the whole, artists take this attitude and perhaps this attitude is right. You feel, perhaps, that you must fall in love, and if other people suffer for it, well it is justified by your poetry. So the artist says something quite arrogantly which the ordinary man probably would not say. I don't think even an automobile manufacturer would say, "I must be unfaithful to my wife for the good of General Motors," whereas a poet is a person who does say that kind of thing. A poet like Lowell is conscious of this dilemna. He may have felt that his imagination offered him a choice—he could have been a good man, in which case he may not have written poetry. But he chose to write poetry, and seems to have felt he had to justify doing things which he probably wouldn't morally have approved in people who weren't poets. Lowell caused quite a lot of suffering to other people, and he was a good man. His poetry is really just one long justification for the pattern of his life. At the same time, he was really very self-aware; he was a good and kind and generous man, who never turned on his attackers, who never said anything mean, except in gossip and amusement, about anyone. A particularly good man, I would say.

INTERVIEWER

I see that our time is about up. Is there anything we haven't covered that you would particularly like to say?

SPENDER

I have recently been amused and taken by surprise several times at my poetry readings. For instance, a woman in Dallas asked me, "Mr. Spender, how will your gossamer dreams help to save the world?" And on another occasion, a man asked, "How many movies have been made of your poems?" Alas, there've been none, none at all.

—Peter Stitt

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Alan Williamson

House-Moving from Tournon to Besançon

(Stéphane Mallarmé, 1866-67)

For Bradford Cook

It's an awesome thing, when fate takes you at your word
at eighteen or twenty. *If Dreams weren't greater than*
Action...
Happiness on this earth! One has to be pretty vulgar
to stoop to it. When I wrote that, two months
before marriage, Marie's weak chest
seemed a kind of grace-note—the blood-hearted
snowdrop—
sharpening the wild-thing poignance of her eyes...
And *un*happiness? A curtain-line, a fling of the sleeve.
Not, at any rate, this matter of two fatigues
grinding each other; the worry when the child
gives her slight cough; the bone-cold rooms,
and happy, sometimes, for those...
Our move here was as moving
is—one's old chair in the fall rain an hour
because the men want coffee...The irksome part was the
need
to be composed through it all; the need, after Tournon,
to think about stopping rumors before they start.

(I must tell you they fired me in mid-term. Wads,
with spit in the middle; and their parents complained
of *me*.
Shoving my face forward into that brute
heaving, making it say *he loves*—
like teaching an atom to be a molecule...)

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The moral: prompt visits
in order of rank; sincere show of interest; cards.

The town? It could hardly be less designed to lighten
such burdens: another of these ancient centers
of war and religion; drip unabsorbable; gargoyles——
The worst, though, is always God: the blank stone staring
west into nothing but its justice, as if
He were as stunned as we to have awakened...

Empty nets of matter, that thought our surface-glitter
was something...

* * *

How eagerly I waited, that first week, for life—
my only real one—to compose itself
with the room as I have it: midnight; the mirror; the window
bulged with my Dreams like firelight—like the drawer
of an ornate old chest . . . But when I sat there, feeling
the words reach to name, then deaden on the page's
familiar virgin emptiness—the thoughts
that returned on me! Ah, my friend,
if, after these gods and ages, the realization
of all our thinking is to think itself Nothing,
why not be—the truth?
I grew unable to feel
myself there except as a kind of skin on the thinness
of the always singular instant. Can it hide itself
in the folds of the curtain, will it run to join childhood
in the mirror-waters? I tore the drawers, for a trace
of it, of *me* . . . And the things stayed, in absolute presence,
inviting me to complete their thought with a stroke
swift, unrevisable, perfect . . .

I floated downward
in the un-being I glimpsed there (I can't

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put this plainer—but, even in class, I lost the meaning
of the commonest words); yet half-wished it now, desiring
that every Dream should die, and—stiff and white,
as at dawn, as from the waters of that old story—the poems
of the world float free.

One day—gray and almost spring—
I looked in my Venetian mirror and saw the person
I had forgotten. When I say I still
need to see him there, to edge
to the next word, or thought—you will know how far I
became
Nothing; or simply a gift the impersonal universe
has for thinking its causeless Idea,
our Work, the great equation
that cancels at last.
I have seen the ends of more than
one life; and have hardly the strength to lift my hand.

* * *

More negotiating with fools, not to spend another winter
in this terrible place. They have denied me
the Département of Lozère, unaware that my work denies
them
Paradise.
I must say the two seem much
the same to me now, watching the first green shiver
along our pollarded plane-trees. I remember how the heat
exerted itself on things . . . A half-witted shepherd
was on trial for rape. The mind moved, behind blinds,
with the sure drift of a sleepwalker: hearing my Faun
hesitantly raise one note to the next, then flow—
and off the fountain-glitter came the nymphs
of living space and air . . .
I felt myself twang half-
inside things: even the hard-cased scorpions that made me
keep the bed legs sitting in cans of live gasoline.

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And if one thinks the world, in that reverberation,
as if Spirit were making it, what difference?
I am trying to learn
to think that way again; not just on the squeaky
first string of the brain. On Easter, I got a terrible headache
from brain-work alone. By an enormous effort
I braced my whole chest-box, seized the impression, and rang
it inward and downward. Ever since then, when I truly
create, I am gone except for my hand and a heart
enormously hollowed and beating . . .
And nothing
is named now: the object
goes by in the miracle of a vibratory
near-disappearance . . .
into what—air, God? Who will ever know?

I need rest after all this; more rest, perhaps,
than kings are ever given. But you are not to worry;
I can't tell you the weight of peace it adds, to have taken
the future up in one's hands. I see
one book, or two, the years fallen into their crystal.
I can't think anything will have been much amiss,
if God send my old age a pleasant actress
willing to have visits in the long late afternoons.
I won't even mind much, if both her windows
and mine look out onto long railroad yards.

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Nightrise

Roger Salloch

Renata said: I've never seen Rheinhardt use more than one match to light a fire. When I break a glass he tells me I've lost control. Just watch him come through the door, every night, punctually, six minutes after the 5:38 gets in. He wasn't always the way he is. Before he came to this country, his paintings were violent. The villages were orange, the trees were blue. Then, when Hitler came to power, the canvases turned black. He was a teacher to support himself. Did you know that? But first they took the history books away and then they took the literature away. He turned to music but one night somebody smashed the instruments and finally gym was scheduled where they once had art. When they took the children away Rheinhardt tried to kill Hitler. Hitler was supposed to address the greater East Prussian conference of high school teachers and Rheinhardt sat in the front row with his father's old revolver. But Hitler never came.

Renata stopped speaking. First she looked at me, then she looked at the mirror on the wall. She looked at the mirror on the wall for a long time and then she turned away and her eyes wandered around the room. It was the living / dining room,

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there were musical instruments and paintings everywhere but she did not seem to notice them. She raised a hand to her eyes as though a bright light were blinding her and when she took her hand away her eyes had nailed her expression to the mystery of whatever she was trying to tell me. She didn't move at all. She said You're fourteen now, it's time you knew. But then it was 5:44, the door opened, Renata stood up, and shutting my eyes I tried to imagine what it would be like to fly into Rheinhardt's arms.

Renata and Rheinhardt arrived in the United States in 1938. Renata came from Stuttgart. Her father was a captain in the German cavalry. He was killed in the First World War and there was no greater pillar of German society than the household he left behind. His widow was a tyrant, a puritan, and, dressed in black lace and iron corsets, a perfect replica of the English queen she so admired. She was also, however, a Jew, and to her surprise the Nazis felt this outweighed her virtues. When she arrived in America with a spinster sister and a child, she was handicapped by an inordinate sense of the injustice she had been done and drawing the brown velvet curtains in the three rooms in New York City to which she had been reduced, she recreated Stuttgart high society as best she could: she tyrannized her sister for never having learned to ride; she changed the carpets with the seasons (a black and red woolen Oriental in the winter, beige twill for the warmer months); and she harassed Renata for marrying an unstable Bohemian who was probably a communist at heart.

Of course, Renata told me, she was wrong. Rheinhardt wasn't a communist at all. In Germany he was a Protestant, and a Prussian. In America he was happy not to be anything anymore. The past was forgotten, the future didn't exist. Rheinhardt didn't even want a child. When we had you he said he wouldn't have another one. Fill the promise of America, that's what the immigration pamphlet said. Become a man. Rheinhardt stopped being one instead. You were conceived

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one night in Norfolk, Connecticut, and I have to tell you this: we never made love again. Perhaps if you had been a girl, it might have been different. He wanted to call you Caroline. Do you know why we called you David? From the *Beggar's Opera,* and I'll call thee David for thou art my son.

Renata stopped speaking. This time we were sitting in the front seat of a blue and white 1950 Plymouth station wagon. Exceptionally, we had come down to pick up Rheinhardt at the station. The train was late, the parking lot was made of blue chip and cinder, I didn't know what to say. Designed to bring us closer, the vast historical enterprise on which Renata was embarked had the opposite effect. She thought facts were a substitute for the tenderness she didn't have the confidence to give and by constantly trying to account for herself in terms of Rheinhardt she had become an abstraction. She was always there, we lived in the same house, but I had begun to think of her as something that had happened long ago and when I shut my ears, eyes, and intelligence to the stories she told me, it was because I didn't want to admit that Rheinhardt had suffered the same fate too.

There he is now she said. I looked up. The train was in the station. A large number of men got off. They advanced towards the parking lot like an army. I craned my neck and Renata said Can't you see him? He's the only one without a hat. He doesn't look well. Be still when he gets in. He doesn't like it when the train is late. He gets a migraine every time.

It was sometime during what Renata called This difficult period that Rebecca came to live with us. She was the daughter of friends who had moved West and she stayed behind for the year to finish junior high school. The skin of her arms had the color and texture of someone with prickly heat and she moved heavily through an invisible thickness that reminded me of dreams: A question of metabolism, Renata said. But welcome her. It will be good for you to have a sister and nice for Rheinhardt to have the company of

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someone with an artistic temperament.

I don't know what Rebecca did at school. At home she sat cross-legged on the couch. Sometimes she played the lute and sometimes she sewed. She almost always hummed and most of the time she did nothing else at all. She seemed happy that way, waiting for Rheinhardt to come home, but when he appeared she would disappear as though she wanted to be discrete. Renata had to call her for supper then and when Rebecca did come down she was late. I'm sorry, I'm not hungry was the excuse she gave, I shouldn't have come down at all, and, inevitably, one night soon thereafter she would not come down. Then Renata told us she wasn't going to call Rebecca again, Rheinhardt looked at Renata as though to make it plain he had always known she could be as insensitive as that, and Renata said Please, let it be. So we let it be until supper was over, Rheinhardt went upstairs to see about Rebecca and mulling over her coffee Renata said: Don't give up, David. Think of me. My father was dead when I was born. For years I lived with the image of a German military hero, a prig, a kind of forebear of the curse that was to come. And then when Mother died somebody finally told me what Father was really like. He was a dashing hero all right—a gambler, and a ladies' man. Everything Mother ever told me about him was a lie. My God how happy I was. Imagine discovering who Father is at the age of forty-two. Menopause is so difficult, David; if it weren't for the little rewards of life, I don't think I'd make it through.

I stood up. Two candles flickered on the mantlepiece. In their light Rheinhardt's collection of musical instruments vibrated with a glow that suggested the rich possibilities they had once had for sound. Even Rheinhardt's watercolors—vacation sketches of villages, houses, the steeples of a church lost beneath the immensity of a whitewashed sky—came to life and I looked at them trying to remember where each of them had been. Then Renata got up to clear the table. She put on the lights. The ghosts of Rheinhardt's presence vanished and I said Good night Renata. She said Do you ever

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wonder how strange it must be for other people that you always call us by our first names? I turned away. I knew she would stand there for a long time, staring at the tablecloth, as though the damask patterns could distract her from despair. I went upstairs.

Every summer Rheinhardt had three weeks vacation. We went to Maine to cruise on three-masted schooners or West to the mountains to walk. When the vacation was over Renata would replace the watercolors hanging on the walls with the latest ones Rheinhardt had done. The old paintings would go into a sea chest and each year I had the right to exchange the watercolor in my room for one chosen from the contents of the chest. The year Rebecca came, she was given first choice. She picked the schooners I was going to take and I said I didn't want one then, but Renata made me take a mountain landscape. It had red cliffs, shale rocks, and, in the foreground, a dead tree. No, I said, I didn't remember when he painted it and Renata said It was in the Sierra Nevada, seven years ago. Then I said I did remember but Renata knew I wasn't telling the truth. It's the tree Rheinhardt whittled at for five hours she said, the one with the burl. There's the scar. We wanted it for a salad bowl but Rheinhardt only had a pen-knife. When he finally got it off and said he wanted to make a sketch of the tree too, you had a tantrum. He finally had to hit you. Rheinhardt's vacations were important to him. If he wanted to chip at a burl for three days nobody was going to stop him. I remember he said his life had been ruined once and he wasn't going to have his son ruin it again.

The painting was on the wall opposite the foot of my bed. I did not look at it. I lay with my head on the pillow and stared at the ceiling. Next door Rheinhardt's whispers stopped, the floorboards of the house creaked, and downstairs Renata broke a glass. Then I heard Rheinhardt leave Rebecca's room and getting off my bed I climbed out on the roof. The wind was high that night but it was easy to edge along the gutter-pipe. Branches of trees kept me from the view of people

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passing in the street and though it was cold, when I leaned forward and peered into Rebecca's room, I was warm. Her skin was very white, she was lethargic and unself-conscious, and shutting my eyes it was easy to pretend that she was undressing for me. Then I opened my eyes to look at her some more but now Rheinhardt had come back, he was sitting on the edge of the bed, and there was something very sad about the way he stroked Rebecca with his hands. I watched for a while and then I crawled back along the gutter-pipe and returned to my room. I wasn't tired but I felt slack. I had always assumed there were things Rheinhardt and I didn't have to say to each other, that they were understood. But the assumptions had come apart. I lay down on my bed again. I shut off my light. I stared unblinking at the darkness and the silence of the house billowed around me and became the night.

Now it is ten years later, Renata and I are sitting in the living/dining room and Rheinhardt is dying. The musical instruments are still hung against the wall but the water-colors are gone. In their place hang dozens of charcoal pastels. Violent storms of geometry, they are drawn on sheets of black velvet paper against which the colors stand out like slashes in the body of an animal. Some of them are trees in high winds, others the sky shattered by light, and still others the familiar architectural forms but brooding with a thick blackness that threatens their walls like disease.

It is not the first time I have seen these paintings. Rheinhardt worked on them at home the winter after Rebecca left. They were never taken down and now Renata says It was the one time the old artist in Rheinhardt tried to reassert himself. Do you remember the ring he made for Rebecca before she left? A blue agate mounted on two pieces of braided silver. It was beautiful but that summer she was wearing it one day while riding a horse. She jumped a fence, the ring got caught in the barbed wire and she lost most of her finger too.

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There is a pause. Renata coughs. She goes on looking at the paintings. She asks me whether she has told me the story before and I say Yes, but it doesn't matter. Then there is another pause and then she says It's funny, the longer I live with them, the more I realize they aren't very good.

Renata turns and her eyes come to rest on me. When I tell her I don't think I've ever heard her express an opinion before she smiles timidly. There is no reason. She is right. Monuments of energy, the manoeuvres of whole armies of secret feeling, the paintings are without vision. In the light of Renata's judgement, they seem transparent, an exercise in clichés, and it is impossible not to feel compassion for the man who worked on them. At the same time, as the paintings lose their vitality, Renata seems to come to life. She is no longer like someone who lived long ago. On the contrary: her face has become indifferent to the passage of time. She must be close to sixty, yet she creates the eery impression that she hasn't done her living yet.

Let's go to the hospital.

We say it together. We smile. On the way there Renata tells me We are such strange people. We aren't like so many of the others. I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't begun my life here by accepting Rheinhardt's terms.

I tell her I don't know. Perhaps you would have left Rheinhardt. Perhaps I wouldn't have had to leave Rheinhardt she says and we leave the question open. There will be time to come back to it. Renata will last.

Rheinhardt: It is Renata who speaks. Her voice disturbs his sleep. He rolls over on his back. He looks very old but his expression is soft, as though he were responding to his mother. Pyjama top open, his chest rides the sheets like one of those churches he liked to sketch, a wash of grey and a few lines to suggest the flying buttresses of ribs. Above him all is white and weightless, the tent in which he lies, the ceiling, and, outside, an immobile sky. Suddenly it seems strange to me that he is there at all and as I look from Renata to him, then at her, and then at him again, I want to encourage him.

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I love you I want to say, and something else I need to believe but cannot articulate because he is only sick, he isn't really dying yet: that life is for the fittest, whereas survival, and so, in some senses of the word, myth, is for the marginal, the silent, and the weak.

Rheinhardt: It is Renata again. He barely opens his eyes. He rolls his head from side to side. It isn't clear that he recognizes us. Then he closes his eyes and they only really open when I reach through the gauze hanging and taking him by the arm Father, I tell him, Father, wake up, it's me.

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David St. John

Of the Remembered

I.
I will tell you. Maybe
You're leaning in the open
Doorway of some Irish bar,
Watching a single tug
Edge a little clumsily into its
Slip, in a Baltimore twilight;
Maybe we're driving the bluffs
Of New Mexico one Sunday morning,
Or maybe the coffee's just
Starting to boil
In the bare kitchen of your rickety
House by the Pacific, as every
Circular pulse of the lighthouse
Slices the dawn fog. Maybe,
At midnight, high on the catwalk
Of the abandoned cannery, we'll
Watch the bent
Ghost drag his skiff onto the shore,
Turning its keel to face the partial
Moon. Maybe it's this drifting in time
You'll no longer imagine, or the body
Of my voice that you hate. Tell me—
Because you remember a woman calling
Out in our sleep? Because nothing's
Left, if
We're alone? *Tell me.* I will tell you.

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II.
I grew up in California,
Where everyone stood a little closer
To the sun. In the San Joaquin
Valley, where I lived, the orchards
And vineyards ran from the Coast Range
To the Sierra foothills;
Those low barracks in the fields went
Politely ignored until the harvest;
Those months of winter fog,
Just the simple revenge of every swamp
Drained off for farm land. Summers,
To escape, I drove to the mountains
Or west to the Pacific, where the beaches
Sprouted heavy eggs of tar as
The off-shore wells
Broke down. In spring, the Sierra streams
Flushed and cleared with melting snows;
I'd sit by a falls, picking watercress.
Once, I watched a dazed squirrel
Drop from a high pine onto a rock
Below. At the tree's base
I dug a shallow bowl in the dirt,
And wrapped the squirrel's split face
In the thick robe of its tail. Late
That summer, I walked
Blue Canyon with a friend, along the trail
His great-grandfather had first broken.
We sat on the slanted porch
Of the loggers' company mess hall; inside,
Cast-iron stoves with grills as wide
As beds, still greased like obsidian. My
Friend whistled an old square dance reel,
Stomping his boots on the broken boards,
To keep time. A year ago, one afternoon
In Big Sur, I was telling this same story
To my son as we knelt at a cliff's lip

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Watching the waves ravel over the rocks.
He stopped me short, pointing to a crescent
Cove where a piece of swollen driftwood
Listed in the tides. I cleared the focus
Of the binoculars onto the coarse fur
Of a seal, its corpse. Even
I tire of emblems. One night, lost
In the typical smoke and liquor
Haze of a club in Montreal, I listened as
The awkward quartet lapsed and soared close
To dawn. Nobody cared if the sax missed
Its cue from the bass,
Or if the brushes shrugged-off the drums,
About those bridges the piano player found
And lost. Yet, as I imagined the words
I might hang to the melody, the sax player
Stood and held a single low note
Over the dim room. The piano player stopped,
The drummer. Then slowly the sax began again,
In that breath caught by the entire bar,
Another tune none of us could name.

III.

Why, it must be close
by him, at that moment,
his old home that he had
hurriedly forsaken and
never sought again, that
day when he first found
the river!

Kenneth Grahame,
The Wind in the Willows

I had walked out into the meadow
Of words, utterly lost. I can remember
My mother and father waving from the towers.

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A few blackberry hedges forked here
And there, dividing the meadow into its maze;
The stiff green walls printed
With buckshot, rat droppings, owl garbage—
Berries, any stain on my fingers. Yet,
I'd never imagined the succulent tongues
Others' dreams could offer. That day, such
An elegant script drew its cirrus on the sky.
I know if the child runs from every meadow,
These weirs and copses, he comes only
To the backwaters flooding the tall, erect grasses;
A surface breaking with the letters of a law. . . .
So, it is this animal sense of belonging
Which lifts your face into the folded blessings
Of the air, into this night blanketing every crib
Of cornstalks by the coiled highways. Though
We too can rise like woodsmoke
From a thin chimney in the pines, as each of our
Lost books kindles the ravings of that fire
Which bakes those dozens of chattering blackbirds
Into one very sweet and remarkable pie.

IV.
I first slept along this estuary years
Ago, where the Navarro fans into the Pacific;
I was married, twenty. A few days before,
Driving out of the mountains above
Santa Cruz, I stopped at a country store
Along the way. Outside, the newsrack:
Cambodia, Kent. I drove north until I came
To this wide scallop of sand and driftwood;
I wanted to stand by the flat waves. In our
Truck, parked in a cliff hollow of pine,
My wife was singing our son to sleep
As the spray whipped up across the night,
Covering me. I've read in books
How a person might one day splinter into slivers

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Or spines of light, but I only remember falling
Unconscious on the white sand. And it makes little
Sense, the noise I heard in the distance
As I came slowly back to myself, maybe just blood
Circling in my ears, or the scrub of the cliff
Set humming by the rising storm, or else
An iron dulcimer
Struck somewhere out beyond the sea. Now, this
Morning, walking again these banks of the Navarro
Towards the Pacific shore, the beach seems so calm,
So undramatic: only the limp kelp, a few driftwood
Limbs, the sand. As I walk beside the water
I've kicked up out of nowhere
Half an old pair of dice—the wobbly Captain
Rattling the bones in his pocket, chancing it all
On the horizon. Yet this single die is so
Small, so beaten by the waves, sand, and coral
Its holes seem carved at random, its edges
Almost round. I know just where I'll use this ivory
Knuckle: I'll slip it into a game of liar's dice
As I lift the felt cup off the polished counter
In front of the solitary bartender. Then, I'll tell
This story, though the chances are
It's nothing he'd really listen to, let alone believe.

V.
Here, tacked by the table
That is my desk, where I sit
In the mornings as the sun unties
The winter trees, is the photo
Of a wolf more
Beautiful than you would imagine
Standing in a landscape
Entirely snow. Caught in profile,
The wolf is turning its head
To face the brief snap of the camera,
Its coat, like the frost on my windows,

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A dim shine tinged with rust. Sometimes
I sit here very late at night
With only one small lamp bent towards
The wall, its narrow bone of light barely
Touching this photo, taken in Canada
And sent without explanation by a friend,
This wolf. Never blinking, never looking away.

VI.

Now the breaths no longer freeze
Along the pane now the light curls
In each leaded square or page
Or Chinese screen these characters
Drawn past waves brushed along the silk
Chaos detail music or the web
The names of the world hang briefly halos
On a broken surface the loose hand
Shadows inking the fire-lit screen
Signature gestures lyrics
The trespasses the shared boundaries
The married spaces of cold news weaving
One and two bodies nearly equal to the world
Unequal to their dream
Now say it now in the dialect
Of fingers over fingers a corporeal tongue
A script of genitals the stiff accents
Of snow on the manes of horses
The manes of young men young women
The strokes of the stick along the tablet
The baking black clay the scored fingers
Of stone so now say it word's flesh
The salts the blame the father's son
The triad's ghost the crows or the rasp plea
Rainbows bent from a book to earth
The book of leaves newly falling leaves
The corpses veins flattened in their pages
The burning manifestoes the diaries

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The leaves like sheets floating
Over each flat body the smoky seamy air
The ambivalent air now say it worshipful
Palm leaves laced with leather cords
No logic's pulse branches at the window
Or the fire breaking its frame
Elegiac conversations slack wastes
Of the pillow the monologue of the double
You undress semaphores bodies along the bed
The broken circle old unbroken square
Now say it the white lotus in the fallen veins
The white cocoons the white needle in the sun
The powdered light catechisms
No last song rising in the closed rooms
First faith bone tablet the skin's shale
The blossoms in every last region of delay
These erasures with within these weather notes

There is a melody inventing itself

VII.
Earth. The word
Mystified me as a child—
With my parents at Italian movies
I heard the truck drivers on the screen
Call the dark women at the roadside
Cafés: *earthy.* And I imagined their pulses
Circled like the sun's, with the tides
Of a daily moon. I began to watch carefully
As every leaf uncurled and waved, falling
To the earth. Plums, figs, apricots, cherries—
They all fell, splitting to seed. I paid
More attention to the rivers stroking the calm
Earth, though—finally—I forgot it all:
I lived in small rooms, piling my books against
The closed door, pouring the acrid coffee
From pot to cup. Then I met a woman
Who loved to sit in the round window of my room

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Burning piñon and lemon grass, taking off
Her clothes when the talk turned abstract. Who'd
Walk me down the paths of the shore gardens
Lying through her teeth about the ancient Mayan
Dragonfly of hope. One night,
She found me in a dockside bar waiting to step
Onto the blackened oily water. The next morning,
She said nothing;
We played my warped 78 of Charlie Poole singing
Didn't He Ramble. Soon, too, I left. New Mexico,
The high plateau of Ācoma, to sit on the ledges
Of the cliff face at Puyé among the carved
Caves of the pueblo, where, for a while, time
Was the sun. In Yosemite, last August,
Hiking the trail to Glen Aulin with my son, I felt
That same print of day. Walking off into the trees
We'd come onto a clearing of low grass. On my back,
As the sun rose towards noon, almost asleep and
Hidden by the trees, I could hear a file
Of rented horses
Shuffling to their stables in the valley below,
And the voice of one rider cautioning—about stocks—
A friend. I opened my eyes. On his stomach, my son
Had crawled to the center of the meadow
Where a city of ground squirrels teased him, rising
First from the holes in the distance, then by one
Of the tunnels at his knees. Closing my eyes, I
Listened as the horses and voices faded, as
My son began chirping at the dozen gold phantasms;
And I slept, my back against the earth.

VIII.
For one year, in both summer and winter,
Everywhere I slept I dreamed of
Women waking crying. Any season, in any bed—
Of one woman asleep beneath the iced windows
Of Our Risen Saviour Hospital. Another

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Curled like a ghost crab in a leather chair.
And of those leaving husbands, lovers, sisters
In San Francisco, London, or outside Cheyenne.
Of women waking to the finches crying
In latticed geometries, in praise. Women waking
Crying, as dawn detailed the city skyline;
All the taxis off Sixth Avenue circling, circling
Like old ballads, simple lives.

IX.
Twin memory, we all seek it
As some God seeks us, though we
Await a softer, more temporal
Lover. That family
We carry across our shoulders,
The coat dedicated to the unending
Winter, advises us on each mistake.
Snow covers the leaves, shadows die
Into a mutual orbit, myths burn
In their seasonal constancy. Tonight,
I remember a story I once read
Of a hero who, to begin his quest,
Must sail across the sky
To its other shore, where his father
Waits, ages dead, to teach him those
Secrets which unlock evil, pointing out
Every road radiating from our star.
Norse? Hindu? Neither, I think.
I've only taken pieces of several
To make one story I love, one chord
I hear most. My friends know it,
In those words for their dead fathers,
That long approach. One summer, as my
Own father's heart rose like a hummingbird
Into his throat,
I wanted to speak *then,* not in any
Postscript of prayers, how I'd hold his head

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In my arms. Now, as the snows still brush
The trees of Baltimore, I know my father
And his curious heart are walking again
In the California sunlight, not yet knowing
This melody is his. If I drove for six
Days west, I might ask him, on that other
Shore, for those answers I'm not certain
I wish to know. Chalice of mountains,
Valley of figs and grapes, where he lives.
And though I travel randomly now, at great
Distances, perhaps those spaces we cannot
See across are less dark
Framed by the two bodies we still carry,
Each for the other. And though my own son
Knows memory pales only slightly any day
Apart, if we stand together
As my graceful father walks the steep path
Along the limestone wall at this garden's end,
Perhaps we'll both see, as I still wish to see,
If, as the stone door closes, faith follows.

X.

Of the remembered
We speak like stones standing
Like any saint whose cold fingers
Hold a blunted tongue
Of the remembered
Scraping the honeycombed earth
Of the remembered
In a garden where the sunlight turns away
Of the remembered
Whose breaths hang like ash
As they recite each loop of the sparrow
Of the remembered
Whose dice roll against the door
Of the remembered
Holding square sails in either hand

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Their hearts caged in smoke
Of the remembered
Rising in the cup of morning
Swinging pitchers of black wine
Of the remembered
At the gates and borders of flint
Revolving in the pupil of the tamarisk
As their boat draws on towards
The set double horizon
Of the remembered
Who tire of being talked about
Who hold still the crescent knife
The skull the prayer flags the sands
The white mandolins
Of the remembered
Who look everywhere for their luggage
At the steps of the forty-nine days
The seven black sails times
Seven leaves of night
Of the remembered
Passing the gates of nectar and toad
Of the remembered
Who are footstools dressed in our robes
With paper faces and bound feet
With conch cake silk and flowers
With mirrors and lyres colored
At the end by flame
Of the remembered
Who will be judged by these scales
Of white pebbles and black
Of the remembered
Closing the soft vertical eyelid of the door. . . .
You light the fire, lay the silver, set the table
With one plate. Behind you, the aged, leaded
Pane reflects the red speech of the liquid evening
Fire. . . . Sitting in the square

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Of an old church, I watch the woman I first
Took for you—her face shadowed by the cathedral's
Ornate spire—as she works
The patched bellows of an Irish pipe. The day's bells
Begin to call past the river's scoured bridges, where
The black branches of the trees cross against the sky's
Marine, lit evenly by the slowly rising Easter sun;

Of the remembered, named. . . .
A drone, reeds: *the melody.*

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Family Album

William Hamilton

When I was very poor, and this I will tell you was not too long ago, I began to smoke cigarettes. The smallest luxury then recalled, I suppose, the greater ones when I was a child.

I bought cigarettes to smoke as a soldier would. I have never been a soldier but my father has and he tells me that a small pleasure will often suffice for a greater one. The poor deal in parts.

I would and will buy the strongest and most expensive cigarettes available, Will's Goldflake, Sweet Afton, Passing Clouds in a salmon-pink box with a birthday-blue insert of Sir Walter Raleigh, yellow Gitanes, the strength of tobacco satisfying my taste and the cost discouraging everything.

My father smokes. He recalls the early morning of a day at war, an enlisted man striking the first fire in the wet country air, an officer's gold lighter appearing like the sun through fog briefly.

I recall running my bath while buying a morning newspaper and having my bath with a cigarette, a newspaper and

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a rather provincial breakfast, jam, never jelly, and bread and butter, while the whole of the city of London went to work with the momentum of men going to war.

Of all the things that we might have shared, including those years when my father refused to support me, it is a taste for tobacco which we share now.

I might mention, before beginning, that we are both trying to quit, but we talk a great deal it seems, over cigarettes.

There is an increasing luxury too I think, to the things we can discuss.

I have a photograph here of my father which I would like you to see. I keep this in my billfold, which I bought as another reward, like tobacco, in a system of reward which I developed to keep myself alive.

I filled the new billfold with things other than money. I kept addresses, notes, calling cards, clippings, photographs in it. That late afternoon of the purchase, I decided to keep this photograph of my father in the silk recess for bills. The brown leather was new and as distinctive a smell as a blend of tobacco, but soft. This, my father would say, is the distinction of good leather.

The photograph is black and white. There is a young man with a gentleman's build holding a black and white soccer ball, which appears very true to itself, and his son, who is five.

He is staring into the camera, at my mother, who is focusing the delicate lens.

My grandfather announces lunch and goes below.

"Ginger, hurry, the boy is getting heavy."

I twist. I am hungry.

It is a silly picture. We are on a boat, a long sailing schooner which my grandfather, at the height of a conservative folly, christened "Tailspin." It is a dark wood deck with brass fittings and a black hull, invisible to the picture my mother is taking, with the ship's name in white letters

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tumbling at the bow in tilted tipsy ragtime style. It was built during the Depression of 1929. My grandfather did not believe in airplanes. He sailed his boat away from the sinking country and photographed everything he saw.

My mother is using her father's camera. She releases the shutter, my father laughs and throws the ball into the air over his shoulder.

"For luck!"

Their dog, Jiggs, leaps the brass rail after it, into the glistening sea.

He is a golden flash in the sparkling noon air.

There is in our family a certain shyness.

You see, my mother died before my sixth birthday in an airplane crash. She had been invited up by a young friend of my father's. It was his own plane and very small. My grandfather forbade her to go.

It is a gruesome detail, I admit.

There is a photograph which survives taken by my father at the Head airstrip in Warrenton, Virginia. He is using my mother's father's camera. She is a young woman with a tall build wearing a borrowed leather jacket and a long flannel skirt and my father says her ski boots and tri-colored scarf. She smiles at my father.

"Hurry!"

She is wearing my father's sunshades and the sun glances her eyes, indicating that the day was pleasant.

My father keeps this photograph with him in his billfold. I have asked for and keep the picture of my father and me which my mother took. It is a stronger memory of my mother to see myself through her eyes.

It is not an amateurish photo.

I received a camera from my grandfather for my sixth birthday, one very much like his. He wants me to be a photographer. I received a child's signet ring from my father which had been his as a child. It was soft and pretty and as hard for a

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child to wear as a leash and I played with it and eventually pushed it into a nugget.

My grandfather took us for a sail in the Chesapeake Bay that morning and I took photographs of the Maryland shore and of the water. The photos are black and white and from the white caps of the waves caught breaking I know now that the water was rough.

I took one picture of my grandfather. He is smoking a plain ivory pipe. He says it is difficult to smoke any other way on a boat.

Coming into port at Gibson Island, my father heard a mourning dove.

In dry areas, it flies daily to water. My grandfather spotted it leaving the ground up across the dark grey sky.

It is our only dove with a long white-edged, pointed tail. I quickly took a picture. Its white tail is the only detail that survives in an otherwise bad photograph taken quickly by a child.

My father recognized it by its voice. At home that evening, he read to me from his field guide:

> Voice: a mournful coo-ah, coo, coo. Nest: usually in tree, loosely built of twigs; or on ground. Eggs: 2, white, 1.1 x 0.9 in.; 2 or more broods in south. The low, gentle coo of this dove brings to mind the carefully mowed lawns and shade trees of suburban estates, where it frequently breeds.

My father's voice has never been so soft and distinct as the night alone when we studied the color plate and talked about flights.

My mother's name was Virginia Dance Donelson. Her father called her "Ginger" and subsequently her friends did and then my father and lastly I do of late. My grandfather named their retriever Jiggs, too. He was a wedding present to my mother and father. The next Jiggs, his son and one surviving puppy, is the color of gold. He was once an excellent field dog and my father insists that his sons will be champions. He began to train them while I was away.

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At the weathered dance pavilion at the Point of Gibson Island, my father sits smoking an oval cigarette with the dogs around him, the grandsons and granddaughters quiet and close before the wind from the water which lifts their ears and chills them into silence.

They do not know me. I take a photograph. It is actually quite good. I have become a writer and not a photographer but the implication of a family is there in the picture, seen through a writer's eyes. My father speaks to them and calls them by name, Jamie, Ginger, Jiggs, Kitty, Andy, Jessica, Jibe. He saved one puppy for me to name when I should return from London. The puppy remained without a name for eight months. It is the strongest male and I named him Jibe. Jibe sits taller than the rest and his square puppy's head is clear and rich against my father's blue sailing sweater. All of them face the sea but Jibe is looking up at the sky, possibly at a bird.

This photograph is in neither my father's nor my own possession but in a family album which we have all contributed to. There are color photographs, as bright as the plates of the field guide, among all of the black and white photos taken by my mother, father and grandfather. Many of the color photos are mine or of me.

There is a photograph of me taken by my father with my camera. I would like you to see it. There is a young man in an English tweed suit holding a soccer ball, with a rather grown puppy dancing at his legs to have it. The ball is black and white but the color shows vivid brown turf on its checkered face. The young man has a pale distant look.

The puppy pounces.

"Jibe!"

The image is blurred. The figures have a ghost. My eyes form vapor trails.

I do not fly in airplanes. I am afraid of them. It took tremendous courage to fly away from home to London. I

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could not afford to sail. Though I was very poor without my father's support, this fear discouraged me from using the last half of my ticket several times. The long sail home was never an issue. My father made this clear. It was and is an issue of luxury and how much independence it affords. We fought at it like a war.

I have made my compromises. Yet a compromise is a small part of a greater whole, like the conditions of peace. I am a writer. I deal in parts, as photographs do, or surrenders, as histories do.

My grandfather will tell you that every man is compromised in a picture by the photographer.

My father and I understand this.

Tonight, in the quiet house, from my room, I listen. My father listens too, downstairs, outside on the black lawn.

There is the flare of my father's match, like dim memory struck, a shutter opened.

I am not sure of what I see.

My father blows out his match. In war, there must be no lights.

He is not sure of what he has heard.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Prudence Crowther is the author of *Return of the Carriage*. She lives in Scandinavia with her two sons.

John Domini has published fiction and non-fiction in a number of periodicals, including *Sports Illustrated* and *Transatlantic Review*. He teaches at Harvard.

William Hamilton is the owner of the Pomander Book Shop in New York City. This is his first appearance in print.

David Ohle is currently teaching creative writing at the University of Texas. His work was previously published in *Esquire, Harper's, TriQuarterly* and *Transatlantic Review*. He is editor of *The City Moon*.

Roger Salloch is a writer who lives in Paris.

POETRY

Ai is the author of *Killing Floor* (Houghton Mifflin), her second book, which was the 1979 Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets.

David Bottoms is a Georgia poet whose work has appeared in numerous national magazines. His first book, *Shooting Rats At The Bibb County Dump,* won the Walt Whitman Prize of the Academy of American Poets (judge: Robert Penn Warren), and will be published in the spring of 1980 by William Morrow & Company.

Joseph Brodsky is the author of *A Part Of Speech* to be published in March (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

Jane Cooper, who teaches at Sarah Lawrence College, is the author of two books, *The Weather Of Six Mornings,* and *Maps & Windows* (Macmillan).

Alfred Corn lives in New Haven, Connecticut. Viking Press will publish a new collection of his work in the fall of 1980.

Jim Daniels is enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. A graduate of Alma College (Michigan), he has been active in the Michigan Creative Writers in the Schools program.

Celia Gilbert was the author of *Queen Of Darkness* (Viking) published in 1977. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James McMichael is the author of *The Lover's Familiar* (Godine). His work in this issue is from a new book-length poem.

Reginald Gibbons won a *Quarterly Review of Literature* prize for his first collection, *Roofs, Voices, Roads*. He is also the editor of an anthology, *The Poet's Work* (Houghton Mifflin), and has recently completed a new book of poems.

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Anthony Hecht is the author of *The Venetian Vespers* (Atheneum). He lives in Rochester, New York.

Lawrence Kearney lives in Miller Place, Long Island. His first book is due to be published soon by Wesleyan University Press.

Philip Levine lives in Fresno, California. Atheneum published two books by him in 1979.

Alice Mattison lives in New Haven, Connecticut, with her husband and three sons. Her work has appeared in a number of magazines, and Alice James Books is about to publish a collection of poems. She also writes fiction and teaches at Albertus Magnus College.

Diana Ó Hehir is a member of the faculty of Mills College in Oakland, California. Her first book, *Summoned* (Missouri), was published in 1976.

Gregory Orr is the author of *After The Guest* (Harper & Row). It will be published in the fall of 1980.

Katha Pollitt lives in New York, where she writes frequently on literary and cultural subjects. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines.

Ira Sadoff is the author of two collections, *Settling Down* and *Palm Reading In Winter* (Houghton Mifflin). He teaches at Colby College in Maine.

David St. John teaches at Johns Hopkins. His second book, *The Shore* (Houghton Mifflin), will be published next year. He is currently on a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship.

Jonathan Sisson lives in Minneapolis. He has contributed to various literary magazines, and his work has been reprinted in the *Ardis Anthology of New American Poetry* and *Best Campus Humor of the Swinging Sixties.*

Dave Smith has completed his fourth collection of poems, *Goshawk, Antelope* (University of Illinois Press). He is currently director of creative writing at the University of Utah.

William Stafford is the author of *Stories That Could Be True: New and Collected Poems* (Harper & Row) published in 1978. He lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon.

Stephen Tapscott teaches at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Goddard College. Wesleyan published his book, MESOPOTAMIA.

Alan Williamson is Briggs Copeland Lecturer in English at Harvard College, and the author of *Pity The Monsters: The Political Poetry of Robert Lowell* (Yale).

ART

Marsha Burns was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1945. Recent exhibitions of her photographs have been held at the Seattle Art Museum and the Silver Image Gallery, Seattle.

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Bryan Hunt was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1947 and currently lives in New York. His bronze sculptures and drawings of waterfalls have been exhibited recently at the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Modern Art, and Blum Helman Gallery, New York.

Joel Shapiro was born in New York in 1941. His sculpture and drawings have been included in recent exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Major exhibitions will be held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, and Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany, in 1980.

INTERVIEW

Peter Stitt is a poetry reviewer for *The Georgia Review* and *Poetry,* and is coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston. He is currently compiling a collection of his interviews with poets Warren, Wright, Berryman, Stafford and Wilbur.

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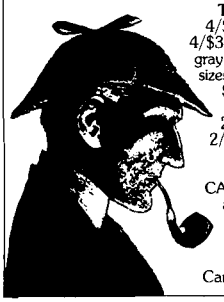

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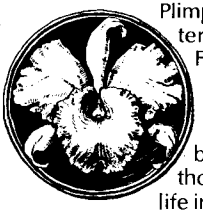

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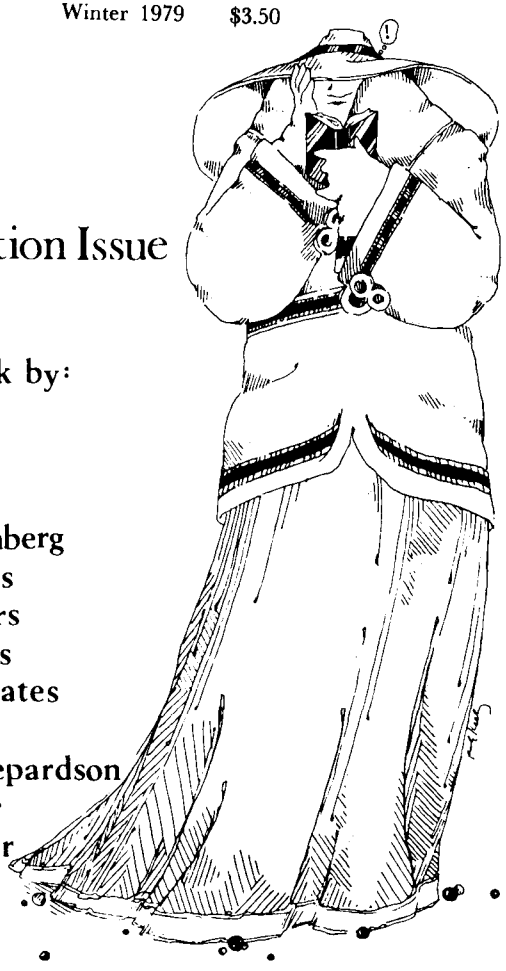

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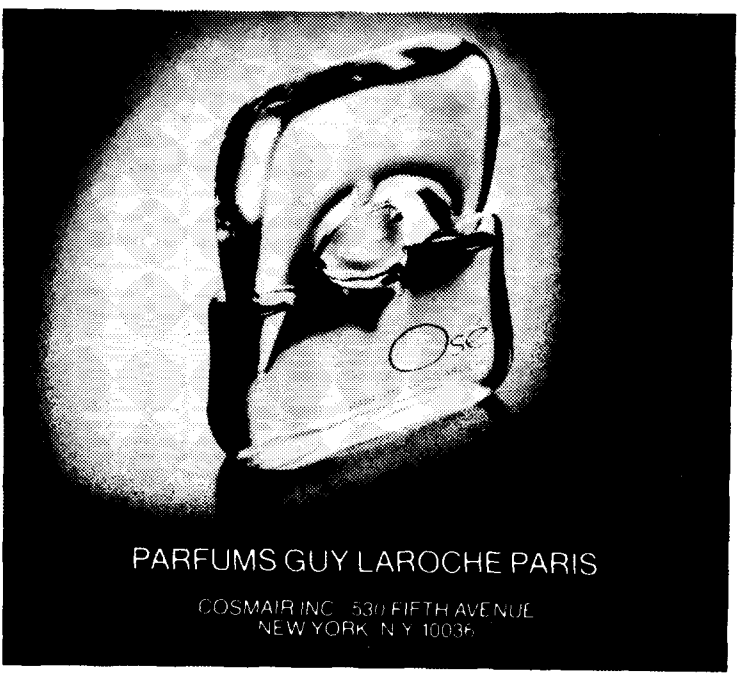

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